BY THE AUTHOR OF "LADY AUDLEY'S SECRET

# ISHMAEL

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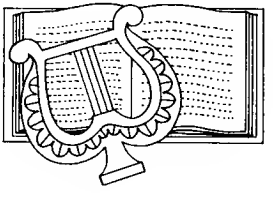

*In Memoriam*

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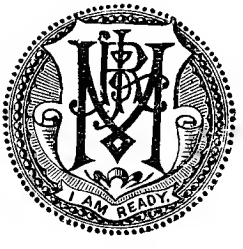
# ISHMAEL

## A Novel

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"LADY AUDLEY'S SECRET," "VIXEN," "WYLLARD'S WEIRD,"

ETC. ETC. ETC.

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# CONTENTS


| CHAP. | | PAGE |
|---|---|---|
| I. | 'THE HARVEST IS PAST, THE SUMMER IS ENDED' | 5 |
| II. | 'HER FEET GO DOWN TO DEATH' | 14 |
| III. | 'CRUEL AS THE GRAVE' | 22 |
| IV. | THE FURNACE FOR GOLD | 35 |
| V. | 'SWEET TO THE SOUL, AND HEALTH TO THE BONES' | 44 |
| VI. | 'THE END OF THAT MIRTH IS HEAVINESS' | 54 |
| VII. | 'THE CROWN OF OLD MEN' | 64 |
| VIII. | 'SHE STRETCHETH OUT HER HAND TO THE POOR' | 74 |
| IX. | 'AS SNOW IN SUMMER' | 84 |
| X. | 'MY SOUL FAILED WHEN HE SPAKE' | 99 |
| XI. | 'THE CITY IS FULL OF VIOLENCE' | 113 |
| XII. | 'DEATH IS COME UP INTO OUR WINDOWS' | 122 |
| XIII. | 'THE BREAKER HAS COME UP BEFORE THEM' | 136 |
| XIV. | 'SHE IS MORE PRECIOUS THAN RUBIES' | 147 |
| XV. | 'AS A ROE FROM THE HAND OF THE HUNTER' | 155 |
| XVI. | 'CAN THE FLAG GROW WITHOUT WATER?' | 161 |
| XVII. | 'A MAN'S HEART DEVISETH HIS WAY' | 172 |
| XVIII. | 'MARRED IN THE HAND OF THE POTTER' | 178 |
| XIX. | 'SET ME AS A SEAL UPON THINE HEART' | 183 |
| XX. | 'BEHOLD, THOU ART FAIR, MY LOVE' | 194 |
| XXI. | 'AND IT BROUGHT FORTH WILD GRAPES' | 201 |
| XXII. | 'HOW WEAK IS THINE HEART!' | 208 |
| XXIII. | 'AS A BIRD THAT WANDERETH FROM HER NEST' | 219 |

| CHAP. | | PAGE |
|---|---|---|
| XXIV. | 'As Messengers of Death' . . . . . | 231 |
| XXV. | 'Scattered toward all Winds' . . . . | 240 |
| XXVI. | 'Their Roots shall be as Rottenness' . . | 251 |
| XXVII. | 'The Rod hath Blossomed, Pride hath Budded' . . . . . | 263 |
| XXVIII. | 'Until the Day Break and the Shadows Flee' . . . . . | 280 |
| XXIX. | 'My Beloved is Mine, and I am His' . . | 293 |
| XXX. | 'Though Thou set thy Nest Among the Stars' . . . . . | 306 |
| XXXI. | 'These are the Men that Devise Mischief' | 314 |
| XXXII. | 'And the Great Man Humbleth Himself' . | 324 |
| XXXIII. | 'And the Day shall be Dark over Them' | 340 |
| XXXIV. | 'The Kingdoms of Nations Gathered Together' . . . . . | 349 |
| XXXV. | 'And the Firstborn of the Poor shall Feed' . . . . . | 363 |
| XXXVI. | 'For, lo! the Winter is Past' . . . . | 377 |
| XXXVII. | 'Let him Drink and Forget his Poverty' . | 389 |
| XXXVIII. | 'Darkness for Light, and Light for Darkness' . . . . . | 396 |
| XXXIX. | 'Thou dost Dwell among Scorpions' . . | 401 |
| XL. | 'And a Stormy Wind shall Rend it' . . | 421 |
| XLI. | 'The Morning is Come unto Thee' . . | 432 |
| XLII. | 'In the Midst of Babylon He shall Die' . | 441 |

# ISHMAEL

## CHAPTER I

'THE HARVEST IS PAST, THE SUMMER IS ENDED'

PEN-HOËL, the old château of Pen-Hoël, reared its steep roof and conical turrets in the midst of a land of orchards, and hillsides, and marshy, fertile meadows populous with cattle, and narrow lanes, with here and there a cluster of old stone cottages and a dingy old inn, which called itself a village. The cottages were substantial and roomy, the barns and rickyards had a wealthy air. Here there was a flock of turkeys in a field, there a procession of gray-brother geese marching along a lane. Yonder, across the salt meadows, the shallow winding streamlets, shadowed by the gray foliage of many a willow—a broad stretch of wet sand glistened in the light, and far away beyond the level sands glimmered the gray of a distant sea.

This was Brittany ; and the house of Pen-Hoël was one of the oldest châteaux in the province, and the man who owned it counted himself one of the best in the land. He was the descendant of a good old Breton family—a race that had never been rich, and which had been going downward financially for the last hundred years. But Raymond Caradec, of Pen-Hoël, did not value himself by the length of his purse. The traditions of his family were to him as gold and silver are to other men. He never forgot to assert his superiority to the common herd. It seemed to him that all the honours and achievements of his race, from the days of St. Louis, had been lying by and accumulating at compound interest to swell his dignity.

Hard for such a man as this to taste the flavour of dishonour! And yet such a cup, bitter as gall, had been given to him to drink in days gone by, when the tall stalwart lad yonder, dark-haired, dark-browed, sullen, was a little child. The boy looked a somewhat difficult subject to-day as he

lounged in a moody attitude against the gray old stone parapet, clothed with ferns, coloured with lichens, rich with the slow growth of ages. He leant with folded arms resting upon the stone, and his handsome dark eyes looking far away to that silvery light upon the sea beyond the barren waste of wet brown sands. Far away on his right the fortress of Mont St. Michel frowned against the sky, a conical mass of granite rock and granite towers, looking like an Egyptian pyramid in the distance. Along the green valley wound the shallow, sluggish Couësnon, the stream which divides Normandy from Brittany; and on an inland summit the white houses of Avranches flashed in the sunlight, reminding the lad yonder of a city that is set on a hill and cannot be hid.

The château of Pen-Hoël stood upon a picturesque height, a green cliff which rose abruptly from the fertile level below, and thus commanded a wide view over the pastoral country; and away to the rocks and the sea, Tombelaine, Mont St. Michel, Cancale. That broad gravel terrace on the height was a delightful walk for a September afternoon such as this—the air clear and mild, the sky a soft, mournful gray, touched with sunlight towards the west, an odour of dead leaves and burning turf from the village in the green valley below.

Between this broad terrace and the château there was a garden, a garden rich in such flowers as flourish abundantly in that genial climate. The nine long windows and glass door of the ground-floor, the ten windows of the upper story, looked upon this garden from the gray stone front of the château. At each end of the building there was a Norman tower with a conical roof, and in the middle of the façade over the glass doorway there was a cupola surmounted by a gilded vane. Under the cupola hung the big bell of Pen-Hoël—a bell that had sounded many a call to arms in days gone by, but which now rang only for breakfast and dinner.

In days gone by—days of adventure, danger, honour, fame. But the days upon which Raymond Caradec brooded with sad and bitter memory this afternoon as he paced slowly up and down the terrace were days of trouble and vexation, pain, grief, shame, dishonour—days which he would fain have forgotten, which he might have forgotten, perhaps, had not the presence of this overgrown, idle, sullen youth of eighteen for ever reminded him of that miserable period of his life.

Monsieur Caradec had been married twice. His second wife was in the salon yonder, a pretty, fragile-looking young woman, sitting at an open window reading a novel, and looking up every now and then to talk to her two children, who were playing together one minute, squabbling or fighting the next,

now rushing out upon the terrace, now running back into the salon.

His second wife was pretty, fair-haired, delicate, somewhat insignificant in face and figure. His first wife was superbly handsome—a Judith, a Cleopatra, a queen among women—tall, moulded like a statue, every line and curve perfection ; eyes of darkest lustre, raven hair, classic profile, peerless complexion. She had all these charms of face and figure, but she was unfortunately the possessor of a diabolical temper ; and after leading her husband a life of unspeakable torment for three years, she ran away from him with his treacherous friend and her lover just as Caradec of Pen-Hoël began to flatter himself that he had got the mastery of that passionate nature, that he had schooled the wildling to endure restraint and domesticity. Guilt soon learns to lie. Coralie d'Estrange was all candour and innocence when she was given to Monsieur Caradec—a girl fresh from the galling restraints of an enclosed convent, glad to marry anybody who would give her liberty of speech and action, fine clothes, and a little gaiety ; but, educated by her seducer, the frank and too-outspoken girl became the sullen, crafty woman, cunning enough to hoodwink even keen-eyed Raymond Caradec.

Thus it was that, although there had been much bitterness between husband and wife, and although Raymond knew that his wife hated him, her flight with his false friend was a thunderclap. He had believed in his friend's honour in the abstract, and the seducer had played so deep a game, had so steeped himself in hypocrisy, and had so coloured his every word and every act with falsehood, that he had appeared to the husband as that one man whom his wife most detested. There had not been a flaw in the acting of their comedy. And one fine morning they vanished, slipped quietly away in the broad noon, carrying the three-year-old boy with them. Before Raymond knew that this triple disappearance, which might mean an accident by land or sea, really meant an elopement, Lucien Rochefort and his mistress had sailed for the Isle of Bourbon, where the traitor had an estate.

At this distance the lovers may possibly have considered themselves beyond the reach of Raymond Caradec's vengeance. If so, they poorly understood the master of Pen-Hoël. He followed them to their voluptuous retreat in the Indian Ocean, their fairy palace in a land of volcanoes—a white-walled villa, with its back against the mountains, and its feet in the sea. He followed them there as he would have followed them to the farthest confines of earth. Within an hour of landing he challenged his false friend, met him next morning at sunrise,

and ran him through the heart in a romantic dell on the shore of that tropical ocean. He left the island by the next steamer with the traitor's blood hardly dry upon his sword, and he left his wife and son without ever having seen the face of either, or made a single inquiry as to their circumstances.

It was only when the island was a vanishing speck upon the horizon line—a spot of darkness on the blue of the ocean, which might be earth or cloud—that Raymond Caradec remembered the existence of the child, and that, in so leaving the island, he was leaving the boy in his mother's keeping, and leaving him to all the chances of evil naturally involved in such companionship; but even this consideration did not soften him.

'She chose to steal him from me,' he said to himself, with a scornful shrug of his shoulders. 'Let her keep the viper she hatched. What should I have to do with him?'

He included the unoffending child in his savage hatred of the woman who had deceived him. She was pure and innocent when she bore him that only child; but there had been no love between them even in those early days, and he had never loved the boy. Six months after the child's birth Rochefort returned from the Isle of Bourbon, where he had been summoned to his father's death-bed soon after leaving college, and where he had lived for some years He appeared unexpectedly one day at Pen-Hoël, was welcomed warmly by its master; and in the companionship of his old college friend Raymond found a resource against the gloom and dreariness of a loveless home. He talked of his wife's faults freely to his friend, made him arbiter in their disputes; and he was secure in the belief that the two hated each other. And now love and friendship had both proved false, and the man who had been to him as a brother was lying in his early grave on yonder tropical shore, and the woman who had been his wife was an outcast.

What was the after-life of the woman and the child so forsaken by their natural protector, so given over to evil destiny—a prey for the gods? Yonder dark-browed boy, Sébastien, could tell what that life was like if he cared to unlock those firm lips of his to tell the story of unmerited sorrow, unmerited shame.

Madame Caradec did not remain long in the Isle of Bourbon after her lover's death. Sébastien had only the faintest, dimmest memories of that volcanic island—a vision of lofty mountain-peaks, snowclad and dazzling; a fertile shore, fruits, flowers such as he never saw in his older years; a blue, bright sea, and curious black faces, friendly and smiling, with flashing teeth and strange rolling eyes. It was all as a dream. Such things had been a part of his life, and he a part of them,

enjoying the sea and the flowers and the hot blue sky with a kind of half-conscious, sensuous existence, like the life of any other young animal rolling upon the sunlit sands.

Then came a long experience of a ship—storms and fine weather, rain and sunshine. He remembered that part of his life vividly. The sailors, and how good they were to him ; and how he loved a certain three—two blacks and a white—who were his special friends and protectors.

His mother ? Well, he hardly knew of her as his mother in those days—had never been taught to call her by that name. He knew that there was a handsome lady on board, who wore fine gowns and sparkling rings, and who lolled all day in a low chair on deck, under an umbrella, fanning herself, and talking to a gentleman who was always smoking. The lady spoke to Sébastien sometimes, the gentleman never. The lady's French maid looked after Sébastien : dressed and undressed him, put him to bed in a berth on the top of her own—a funny little berth, with a round scuttle port staring in at it like a giant's eye—an eye that watched him sleeping or waking, and of which he felt sometimes a strange, indescribable fear, as if it were alive and a thing of evil.

The ship was a steamer. A horrible monster in a black and fiery pit—a monster with gigantic arms and legs of shining steel, a living thing that throbbed and plunged by day and night—drove the great ship through the water, and very nearly drove Sébastien out of his mind when he tried to understand what the great fiery thing was and what it did. Even in those days he had a passionate yearning for all kinds of knowledge, to understand the meaning of all things : why the stars shone and what they were ; why the waves rolled and rose in this way or that, and the nature of that strange white light which gleamed and flashed upon the ever-moving waters ; where the world ended, and where dead people went.

He questioned the sailors upon all these subjects ; and his favourite Blackie, who had a vivid imagination, answered him very fully out of his own African inner consciousness, enriched by the superstitions and traditions of his race ; so that, when he landed at Havre at four years old, Sébastien Caradec was steeped in Malagasy folk-lore, and knew very little else.

His next memories were of a house among trees and flowers —not such trees or such flowers as he had known yonder, by the Indian Ocean. Everything here was on a smaller scale and of a less lavish loveliness. The house was small, but it was full of prettiness and bright colour. The garden was only a lawn, with a bank of flowers and a belt of foliage surrounding it, and a fountain in a marble basin in the middle of the grass ; it was

so small that Sébastien had explored its innermost recesses in ten minutes, and had to begin again and go on beginning again all day long, since his sole amusement was to be found in this garden; save on those rare occasions when Lisette, the maid, took him for a long walk in the big, wonderful city a little way off—a city of streets that had no end, of houses that seemed to reach to the skies—horses, carriages, fountains, endless shops, numberless people, a perpetual trampling to and fro, and the sound of trumpets and drums, a bright vision of helmets and prancing steeds, or a little troop of foot soldiers marching by, with a giant in front, swinging a gilded staff, and strange-looking men in white leather aprons, marching two and two. Then came the splendour of carriages flashing past, carriages drawn by four horses. The Citizen King was ruler in that old-fashioned Paris, and Prince Louis Napoleon was still beating the pavements of West-end London, and hatching the policy of the future—dreaming of a new Paris, in which he should be master, a Paris all beauty and luxury, vivid, glorious as the crystalline city of the Apocalypse. Who shall say how glorious were the dreams behind that inscrutable brow, which had faced failure and defeat, a father's stigma, the world's contempt, prison and exile, and which still pressed steadily forward to the goal?

The handsome lady who had been on board the ship sat among the flowers in the verandah, and fanned herself, and talked to the gentleman who smoked, just as she had done on the deck of the steamer. He was a stoutish man, very dark, with blue-black hair, and black, almond-shaped eyes; and Sébastien hated him without knowing why. The man was never absolutely unkind to the boy. He only ignored him. The woman was sometimes kind, sometimes cruel. She would play with the child, and caress him passionately in the morning, and fling him from her in the evening, in a burst of anger, for which he had given her no cause.

Lisette said Madame was a good soul, but was not always herself. Sébastien wondered what it was to be not oneself, and why this mother of his changed so curiously—soft and fair, and gentle and caressing in the morning; red and angry, with eyes that flashed fire, at night.

She went out very often in her carriage with the dark gentleman; after midday it was more usual for her to be out of doors than at home. She went to races, to drive in the Bois, to dine at a fashionable restaurant, and almost every evening to the opera or theatre. Her toilet was a solemn business, which occupied her and Lisette for an hour and a half at a stretch; and then she came downstairs rustling in silk or satin, with an Indian shawl upon her shoulders, a plume of feathers

in her bonnet. Everything about her was rich and beautiful. The sheen of satin, the glow of colour, caught the child's eye and fascinated him.

'Mamma, how pretty you are!' he cried one day; and then she caught him up in her arms and kissed him, and called him her little angel, and took him out to look at her horses, the beautiful golden bays, nodding their thoroughbred heads in glittering bright harness, champing their bits.

Sébastien had often patted the horses and admired the carriage, but he had never ridden in it, had never sat by his mother's side upon those brocaded cushions.

One day he asked her to take him with her, pleaded to her piteously as little children plead for trifles—as if this one thing were a matter of life or death.

The dark man was standing by, and she turned to him with an entreating look—looked at him as a slave looks at her master.

'May not I take him?' she asked. 'Why shouldn't I?'

'Why shouldn't you? Because I did not buy that carriage for another man's brat to sit in. Take that little howler indoors, Jean' (to the servant), 'and strangle him if he doesn't hold his tongue. You ought to have left him in Bourbon with his darkeys, as I advised you. He would have done very well there, and he is in everybody's way here.'

In everybody's way. That was a hard saying, and although Sébastien was not quite seven years old when he heard it, the full meaning of the speech went home.

He never asked to go in his mother's carriage after that unforgotten day. He never again went into the portico when she was going to her carriage; never loitered in front of the steps to pat the horses' satin coats, to look into their full, brown eyes—brown under a violet film, large kind eyes which he had loved to contemplate. He shrank away from that pompous equipage and the smart livery servants as from an unholy thing. The men had a way of grinning, of muttering confidences to each other, which he hated. Lisette was the only person in the house whom he liked, and the time was fast coming when he should cease to trust even her.

It seemed to him that he had been living for summers and winters innumerable in that house in the Bois de Boulogne. The geraniums, and verbenas, and heliotropes, and calceolarias, a mass of scarlet, and purple, and gold, being renewed again and again; the leaves falling and returning again; and yet he was not nine years old. Days so idle and empty, a life so monotonous, seemed endless. He was nearly nine years old, and he was only an idle little vagabond in fine clothes. He could hardly read, although Lisette pretended to teach him—and

Lisette was supposed to be a superior person, quite above the average lady's-maid. But in a house where the mistress lived only for dress and pleasure, and had, moreover, a certain failing which was only spoken of in whispers—that terrible failing of being sometimes just a little 'out of herself'—it was not to be supposed that the maid would be orderly or industrious. Lisette dressed like a woman of fashion in Madame Caradec's cast-off clothes, and her favourite occupation was to stroll in the Bois, or to roam the streets of Paris under the excuse of giving the boy an airing. Sébastien had many such airings, and grew to hate the streets of Paris, where Lisette indulged all the instincts of the true *flâneur*, looking into print-shops, jewellers', booksellers', milliners'; looking on at street rows, listening to street music, reading the bills of the theatres.

The house in the Bois was the kind of house which agents always call a *bijou* house, and was much better worthy that qualification than many houses so called. It had been built by a famous opera-singer in the zenith of her career, and sold by her in her decline. It was a thing of beauty in the *genre* Louis Quatorze, for people had not then discovered that your only true loveliness lies in the *genre* Louis Seize.

It was a small house, on two floors; the rooms panelled in white and gold; ceilings and doors painted with Cupids and rose garlands; looking-glasses wherever they could be introduced; gilding everywhere; sofas and chairs and *portières* of Gobelins tapestry.

The rooms on the upper floor all opened out of a spacious central landing, lighted from the top; the staircase descended in a circular sweep from this gallery, and every sound on the floor below travelled upward through this wide opening, and was distinctly heard upon that upper story where Sébastien slept in a little room next to Lisette's bed-chamber.

Thus it happened that he was startled from his sleep one night by the sound of voices below—loud, angry, menacing; and then came a peal of bitter laughter, and then a woman's shriek. He leapt from his little bed, and rushed to the gallery, and looked over the gilded balustrade. There was no one in the hall below, where the lamp shed a soft light tempered by ruby glass—a light that tinged the marble pavement and the white bear-skin rug at the foot of the stairs with roseate gleams. The hall was empty, but those angry voices were still sounding in the drawing-room.

'Why did I ever trust my life with such a brute? What could I see in you to like?'

'You saw plenty of money: that is what you like!'

'The meanness—to remind—obligations—insufferable vulgarity!'

The words came in gasps like javelins hurled in the face of a foe.

'You are insatiable—a bottomless pit for money!'

'A gambler—a profligate!'

'You drink like a fish!'

'Drink—oh, execrable liar—drink! Not an hour, not a day, will I live under such insults. Here, and here, and here—take them back—every one! Take your diamonds! Do you suppose I value such dirt from a man capable——?'

And then came a burst of hysterical sobbing, a muttered oath in the man's bass voice, a door flung open below, a staggering, uncertain rush up the stairs, the swirl and rustle of a woman's satin gown, a figure lurching against Sébastien as he clung to the balustrade, pushing past the poor little trembler, unconscious of that childish presence.

'Adieu?' called the bass voice from below; 'remember, when *I* say adieu, it means for ever.'

There was no reply from above. The swaying, tottering figure had vanished through the open door of Madame's bedchamber. Stifled sobs, angry mutterings sounded faintly from within; but there was no reply to that voice below.

'Very well, then, it *is* adieu,' said the voice, and then came the sound of footsteps crossing the hall. The heavy outer door was opened and slammed to again with a reverberation that sounded like the closing of a chapter in a life-history.

## CHAPTER II

### 'HER FEET GO DOWN TO DEATH'

WHEN that outer door shut with its sonorous clang, Sébastien had a feeling as of freedom and safety suddenly recovered. The dark man was gone. Those sinister eyes, which had so often contemplated him with a moody look, were on the outside of the house. While the man was inside, the boy had lived in ever-present dread of him and of that darkling look. He was gone now, and the manner of his departure meant that he was gone for ever.

Sébastien crept through the half-open door into his mother's bedroom, a little white figure in a nightgown. He crept across the thick Aubusson carpet, and squatted down on the edge of the estrade upon which his mother's bed stood—a regal bed, tall, splendid, draped with amber satin and heavy old Flanders lace.

How beautiful the room was in the soft light of the shaded lamp ! Sébastien had never entered it till to-night. Among the mysteries and secrets of that house this room had been the most mysterious. Sébastien had never dared to cross the threshold of that door. He had seen his mother emerge, radiant and beautiful, like a goddess from a temple ; but the temple was not for his feet to enter, and the boy—petted in one hour, thrust angrily aside in the next—had lost all the natural audacity of childhood.

But to-night his mother was in trouble, and he wanted to comfort her if he could. He clambered upon the bed, and put his arms round her, and kissed her wet cheek. She murmured some broken words, and then dropped into a heavy sleep, disturbed now and again by a groan or a little cry as of pain. The boy slipped gently from her side, and sat on the estrade, with his head leaning against the bed, and looked wonderingly round the room.

Yes, it was very beautiful : a room modelled upon that old stately pattern of Versailles in the days of the great king ; a miniature reproduction of that room in which the mighty Louis lay dying, with Madame de Maintenon and all his courtiers watching the last flicker of that expiring light. Dressing-table, with scattered trinkets amidst a litter of ivory brushes, silver hand-mirror, cut-crystal bottles, fans, jewel-caskets, sachets : wardrobe with doors of marqueterie and ormolu, one door half open and revealing the heaped-up satins and cashmeres on the shelves within. Everything was costly and more or less artistic, and the mistress of all this finery lay there like a log, sleeping off the fumes of wine.

The days that followed that night were the happiest days of Sébastien's childhood. His mother and Lisette went off to the sea next morning, carrying the boy with them. It was August, and divine weather. They stayed at Dieppe, at an hotel facing the sea, and sat upon the beach half the day, and drove about the country the other half, and dined together in a pretty little room with a balcony overlooking the sea; and after dinner Sébastien went to bed and slept soundly, steeped in fresh air and sunshine, and the bliss of fancying himself beloved by his mother; while Madame Caradec and Lisette went to the casino, where the lady gambled and the maid looked on.

These halcyon days lasted for about a fortnight, by the end of which time Madame Caradec had spent or lost all her money. She went back to Paris, expecting to find her lover subjugated by this hard treatment, unable to endure life without her, and ready to grovel at her feet for pardon. Instead of this state of things, she found an auctioneer's bill posted against the walls of her bijou villa. Minions of the law were in possession of the splendours that had been nominally hers. The door of the fairy palace in the wood was shut against her for evermore.

The blow was sharp, and went home. Still in the zenith of her charms Madame Caradec had believed until this moment that her power over her slave was limitless. From the day of her arrival at Bourbon, beautiful, triumphant, happy in her escape from a husband she hated, and in her union with a lover she adored, Laurent Deschanel, the rich creole, had been her devoted admirer. He had followed her like her shadow, had endured all the arrows of an insolent tongue, and all the outrages which a proud and passionate woman, doubly sensitive on account of her false position, her blighted name, could heap upon the man who dared to assail her constancy, to try to tempt her from the lover for whom she had sacrificed home and country. She had laughed at his love, and the sordid temptations which he offered—a settlement—jewels—a position such as Lucien Rochefort could never give her.

Then came the bloody close of her brief day of bliss; and she was alone in a remote colony, without a friend, without a counsellor, outlawed by her sin, and almost penniless. Laurent Deschanel seized his opportunity. A month after Lucien's death, when Madame Caradec had tasted the cup of bitterness and desolation, he came to her in a new character—he came as consoler, adviser, friend. He offered her his purse just as she was beginning to feel the horror of being penniless in a strange land. She received him with scant civility, but accepted the use of his purse; and six months afterwards she left the

island, where her presence was a scandal, as Laurent Deschanel's mistress. The man adored her, but he was a creole, with all the creole vices. They led a life of sensuous ease, of frivolous pleasure, recognising no higher law than their own fancy, no higher aim than the enjoyment of the hour. Their life, for the most part, had been made up of quarrels and reconciliations, and many of those quarrels had been every whit as violent as that last dispute after which Monsieur Deschanel had cried 'Good-bye for ever.' Coralie fancied this quarrel would end as the others had ended, and that Laurent would be all the more her slave because of that fortnight of severance. He would have discovered the emptiness of life without his idol.

Madame Caradec did not know that her slave had for some time past been somewhat weary of his chains, and that an ido who takes too much fine-champagne and chartreuse, and has fits of gloom and nervous crises of passionate despair in her cups, bewailing the bitterness of Fate and the loss of honour, is apt to pall upon her worshipper. She woke from a dream of despotic power to find herself an outcast, friendless in the streets of Paris, face to face with stern reality for the first time in her life. Mistress and maid put their heads together, and, after much driving to and fro in a hired carriage, they found lodgings in a somewhat tawdry hotel in the rue St.-Honoré. The rooms were expensive, the furniture was gaudy, and Sébastien saw his small figure, in a velvet tunic and lace collar, reflected at every angle in the tall looking-glasses which adorned the room. It seemed to him as if the chief furniture of the apartment consisted of looking-glasses and ormolu clocks. He heard the monotonous tick, tick, tick on every side, go where he would. The street was narrow, and the heavily-draped windows let in the gloom of a dull, gray evening. Everything was different from the lovely little house in the wood yonder.

'Mamma,' cried Sébastien, hanging on his mother's satin gown, 'when are we going home again?'

'Never!' she answered, angrily, with hoarse, thickened accents, which the boy knew too well—her evening voice. 'We have no home.'

After this came other changes. They seemed to be always removing to new lodgings. Lisette managed everything. Madame seldom left her room till late in the afternoon. At one time they occupied an apartment in the Champs-Elysées—pretty little rooms with low ceilings, an *entresol* looking into a small garden where Sébastien could play in his lonely, dreary fashion, very tired of solitude and confinement. On fine evenings he went out with Lisette, and saw the lamps and heard the music in a garden near, and played with strange children, while

Lisette conversed with her numerous friends. His mother was seldom at home of an evening. He saw less of her now than even under the Deschanel dominion, severe as that *régime* had been.

Strange faces came and went across the shifting scenes of Sébastien's life at this period—faces which never grew friendly or welcome to him. There was a stout elderly man, with a gray moustache, who seemed to have some kind of authority, and with whom Sébastien's mother had terrible quarrels, which recalled the scene in the villa. He disappeared when they left the Champs-Elysées ; and now their lodgings got shabbier and shabbier, until Sébastien, after having been awakened suddenly out of his sleep one night, huddled hastily in his clothes, and hurried off in a *fiacre*, awoke in the gray winter light to a wretched, bare-looking little room with whitewashed walls. He had never seen such a room in his life before. It was like a cell in a prison. There was no furniture but a narrow iron bedstead and a rush-bottomed chair. He got up and stood upon the chair to look out of the window, and turned sick and cold at the sight of the yard below him. He was on a sixth story. Long rows of windows faced him on the other side of a quadrangle : shabby windows with every variety of blind or curtain—with clothes hanging out to dry—with all those signs of humble poverty which were new to Sébastien.

He took fright suddenly. Why had he been brought to such a place? Appalling stories of child stealers, wherewith Lisette had beguiled the weariness of long winter evenings, flashed across his mind. He had been stolen—last night when he was too sleepy to be quite sure who carried him downstairs and put him in the *fiacre*—and brought to this dreadful place, a prison for stolen children. He was going to rush out of the room in a panic, when he heard a familiar voice close by. It was Lisette singing the last popular refrain, '*Faut pas fermer l'œil*,' in her Porte St.-Martin voice, close by. Yes, Lisette was in the adjoining room, with which the door of his little cell, or closet, communicated. He rattled at the door, which was bolted, and Lisette opened it and admitted him to a bare-looking room with a few poor sticks of furniture, a chest of drawers with a cracked marble top, a tawdry gilt clock that had long left off going, a round table, and a wretched little bed in a corner. There was a smaller room within, for Madame Caradec, who must have her den in which to sleep half the day. There was a coffee-pot on a black iron stove, which projected into the room, and there were some preparations for breakfast, scanty enough, on the table. Everything had a barren, poverty-stricken look. Sébastien did not know that his mother and her confidential servant had lived on credit as long

as tradesmen would trust them, and that this sudden plunge into abject poverty was the natural result of exhausted credit. To Sébastien the change appeared unnatural. But Sébastien was not a pampered child. He was not accustomed to have his comfort studied, his wishes gratified. He had been flung about like a ball all his little life, put here or put there, caressed or thrust aside, as suited the convenience of his owners. And now he ate his breakfast of a roll without any butter, and a cup of coffee, without venturing to question Lisette about the sudden change in his surroundings.

As the time went on the boy grew accustomed to this squalid life. It was a long, long winter—joyless days, dismal nights, for his mother and Lisette were never at home of an evening. He spent those long evenings in utter solitude, locked in the bare, cheerless room, listening to all the sounds of the huge, uncleanly barrack in which he lived—sounds of brawling, strife, drunken fury, drunken mirth; cries of murder sometimes, and the crash of furniture thrown over, the dull thud of a cruel blow; children squalling, naked feet pattering along the brick-floored passage; vulgar voices singing vulgar songs, whistling, screaming, laughter; and now and then, for variety, a visit from the police.

So the boy passed his tenth birthday, steeped in ignorance —for Lisette had long ago abandoned her feeble attempts at tuition—and very weary of his first decade of existence.

His mother and her companion had found an occupation for their evenings at a theatre in this wretched quarter—a theatre frequented by workmen and their womenkind, and where the entertainment was of the strongest order. Madame Caradec's beauty and Lisette's impudence were their only recommendations for the dramatic profession. Madame was engaged as a showy figure in a fairy spectacle. She had but to stand where she was put—a nymph draped in spangled gauze in a tinsel grotto. Lisette, the brighter and cleverer of the two, was entrusted with a speaking part, and sang her half dozen couplets, in the approved style, 'with intention.'

Sébastien was not allowed to go to the theatre where his mother was engaged. It was to him a mystery, but he heard the two women talk of it as they sat late into the night drinking some yellow liquid, which looked like melted gold, in their glasses, and which they spoke of laughingly by all kinds of strange names. Sébastien used to hear them talking late into the night from the little iron bedstead in his cell. He had too little air and exercise in the long dreary day to sleep well at night.

Life went on after this fashion all through the winter. On Sundays Madame Caradec slept till evening, or else rose rather

earlier than usual and went out with Lisette, dressed in her best gown, for a day's pleasure. Sébastien never knew where they went, or what their pleasures were, save from their disjointed talk after these revels about the dishes they had eaten and the wine they had drunk. His mother's best gown and bonnet had a slovenly air now. The satin was frayed, the sleeves were worn ragged at the edges. The Indian shawl had lost its beautiful colouring, and had been darned in ever so many places by Lisette, who now dressed as well as her mistress with the cast-off finery that had been flung to her in days gone by. A good deal of this finery had gone to 'my aunt,' but enough was left to make the maid as much a lady as Madame.

Spring came. March winds—bitter, biting winds, which seemed to work their own will in the great bare barrack, with its endless corridors and its hundred rooms, carpetless boards, bricked passages, a house that was old before it had lost its air of raw newness, woodwork shrunk, panels of the doors split, staircase walls green with dirt and grease. Every one who rubbed against the wall seemed to leave the taint and smear of a sordid existence behind ; every one who mounted the stairs left the print of dirty boots.

There were no shutters, no curtains, no draperies to shut out the cold. The east wind shrieked and whistled in the passages as in a mountain glen. Madame Caradec complained that a villainous cough, which had fixed its claws upon her at Christmas, would never be any better so long as she lived in that infected hole. She was very angry when Lisette suggested that the cough might go if she would leave off drinking brandy.

'Why do you drink it yourself if it is poison ?' she asked.

'I only take a taste now and then to keep you company,' answered Lisette ; which was not true, although there is no doubt the maid was much more sober than the mistress.

The bleak March made Madame's cough much worse. It grew so bad that she was obliged to give up her engagement—her twenty francs a week—at the theatre, her Sundays' feastings on the boulevard or in the suburbs.

Her cheeks were hollow, her eyes brilliant with hectic light. She was no fit occupant for a tinsel grotto, for Juno's peacock car, or the palace of the fairy queen. Lisette, who had developed some talent in the soubrette line, was now the only bread-winner, and her thirty francs a week did not go very far. Before that month of March was over everything that could be taken to my aunt had been so taken, even to Madame Caradec's last satin gown and Indian shawl, and the large Leghorn bonnet with its marabout plumage. She had only a *peignoir* left ; but as

she hardly ever rose from her bed now, this did not much matter.

She was sorely ill, and suffered a great deal. While Lisette was at the theatre, Sébastien used to sit by his mother's bed for hours, deeply sorry for her, full of silent pity. He gave her brandy when she asked for it if there was any there to give. Who could refuse her the only thing that seemed to give her relief from that terrible oppression, that labour and pain in every breath she drew? The boy understood dimly, from Lisette's talk, that it was wrong to drink brandy; but he knew that sick people must have physic, and this yellow stuff, which shone and sparkled in the glass, seemed the only physic that was of any use to his mother. A doctor came in once or twice a week and looked at her, and went through certain formalities with a stethoscope, and took his fee of a couple of francs, and went away again, without having been of any more use than the organ-grinder down in the street below, grinding the same airs from the '*Dame Blanche*' and the '*Domino Noir*' over and over again on certain days of the week.

One day, when the doctor had paid his visit, Lisette followed him into the corridor, and came back a few minutes afterwards with her wicked little Parisian face all blotted with tears—that audacious countenance which had so many grimaces for the blouses in the pit and gallery yonder. Sébastien asked her why she was crying, but she frowned at him and pointed to the bed for her only answer; and he knew that she was sorry for his mother, whose breathing was so painful, and whose hands and face scorched him when he caressed her. There were two red fever-spots on her hollow cheeks, and her eyes shone like glass.

Later in the evening, when Lisette had put on her cloak and bonnet to go to the theatre, Sébastien heard her talking with one of her gossips in the corridor.

'She will die,' said Lisette, 'and who is to pay for her funeral? She was born a lady, poor thing. It would be hard if she were taken away upon the poor people's common bier to be flung into their common grave.'

'Is there no one?' asked the neighbour.

'There are three or four. I have written to them all. One answered—he who once thought gold too common for her—that she might starve or rob for ought he cared. Another sent me twenty louis at the beginning of her illness, but told me not to trouble him again. Another gave no answer. There is only the husband left. I think, perhaps, he would pay for the funeral for the sake of being sure he had got rid of her.'

'Why don't you write to him?'

'She would be so angry,' murmured Lisette.

'How can that matter? She will be dead before he can answer your letter.'

The neighbour was right. Lisette wrote to Raymond Caradec, of Pen-Hoël, by the next day's post; and Coralie was dead before her husband came in person to answer her handmaid's letter.

She was lying on her shabby bed in the wretched lodging, two tall wax candles burning on the little table beside her pillow, and a little spray of box lying between them. They had folded her hands upon her breast, and laid a cheap little metal crucifix and a twenty sous rosary above them. All the taint and soil of her sins had vanished from the marble face. It was almost as beautiful as the day she came out of her convent school to plight her faith to Raymond Caradec. His youth came back to him, all the fervour and hope of that day, as he stood looking down at his dead wife in the chilly, gray March afternoon, amidst the sordid surroundings of the workman's quarter, bare walls, dirt, squalor. He, the proud bearer of a good old name, the dishonoured husband, knelt down and touched the marble hand with his lips. He had hated her while she lived; but pity melted the ice at his heart: the awfulness of death was stronger than anger or revenge.

He said a prayer, dipped his finger in the holy water beside the bed, crossed himself, and went back to the sitting-room, where Lisette and Sébastien stood waiting for him. The boy's pale face turned towards him wistfully as if entreating for a father's kindness.

Caradec hardly glanced at his son. He took out his purse and unfolded three or four bank-notes, which he handed to Lisette.

'There is money for the funeral. Let it be simple but decent,' he said; 'and let there be no name on the coffin or the headstone. Initials and a date will be enough. She will be buried at Montmartre, of course?'

'That is nearest,' said Lisette.

'And the nearest is best. Why loiter on the last stage of a journey?' said Caradec, with a saturnine smile. 'The boy will go back to Brittany with me.'

Sébastien put his arms round Lisette's neck. After all, she was the only friend he had ever known since he parted from his sailor friends on the steamer—she had nursed him when he was sick, she had amused him when he was well: all he had ever known of motherly care was that which he had received from her.

'May not she go with us?' he asked.

'No, child; there is nothing for Mademoiselle to do at Pen-Hoël; and such an accomplished young person would not like to be buried in a country château,' answered the Count, scoffingly.

He had a carriage at the door. Lisette put Sébastien's poor little wardrobe into a small valise, and the three went downstairs together, the workmen whom they met on the stairs, the women and children at their open doors—all staring at the tall, dark gentleman who had such a grand look, and who was leading the shabby, out-at-elbows little lad down the dirty stair by the collar of his threadbare jacket. Everybody wanted to know what it all meant. Lisette had ample entertainment offered her by her gossips when she went upstairs again. A '*goutte*' here, and another '*goutte*' there, would she but only talk her fill, and tell all that could be told about the handsome corpse lying in the candle-lit room yonder, and the handsome gentleman who had just gone downstairs.

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## CHAPTER III

### 'CRUEL AS THE GRAVE'

MONSIEUR CARADEC and his son left the rue Jean-Jacques Rousseau that evening by the Malle Poste for Brest, quite the rapidest way of travelling in those days. They sat side by side in the *coupe*, with one other traveller, and travelled all that night and all the next day. It was in the twilight of a cold spring evening that Sébastien saw the towers and pinnacles of Mont St.-Michel stand darkly out against the yellow sunset sky, and the gray sea deepening to purple towards the distant horizon. The whole of the journey had been full of interest to him. His young limbs had been cold and cramped half the time; but his young eyes had devoured the landscape, his young soul had drunk deep of delight. The trees and fields, the hills and valleys, the winding streams and dark mysterious woods—all these were new to the young captive of the city, who had longed with a passionate longing for escape from the blank and drear monotony of stone walls, dirt, and squalor. That house in the Faubourg Montmartre had hung upon him like a nightmare, had crushed his young spirit, dulled his young blood. What ineffable rapture, then, to be borne swiftly along these dewy country roads, to see the river shining under the stars, to

watch the moon rushing among the clouds—he never suspected it was the clouds that went so fast, and not the moon—to hear the kine lowing in their willowy pastures—the village cock crowing as the mail-cart drove past farms and cottages in the sunrise! What a delight to descend at the village inn for a hasty snatch of food, a cup of coffee, a crust of bread and butter, and then up again and away!—the post-cart stops for neither king nor kaiser—and so, and so, till in the deepening dusk they alighted at the bottom of the hill crowned by the turrets and gable ends of Pen-Hoël.

After this came a life of solitude and abandonment almost as complete as that of the fairy palace in the wood near Passy. The Count had taken his boy back to the château because it was the easiest way of disposing of him, not for any love that he bore to Sébastien. What love could he feel for a boy who seemed to him the incarnation of past wrongs? His own son, yes; but it was of Coralie he thought when he looked at the boy, albeit Sébastien was a true Caradec—dark-eyed, tall, broad-shouldered, with marked features, and a proud carriage of the head.

Raymond let his son run wild, saw as little of him as possible, and thought he had done his duty to the boy in the way of education when he had engaged the services of the village priest—a benevolent old man, born in the peasant class, and no marvel of erudition—as Sébastien's tutor. Father Bressant was horrified when he found that, at eleven years of age, Sébastien could neither read nor write, and the first year of his tuition was devoted to these elements of all learning and the Church catechism. In the second year the curé taught his pupil a little Latin, and the history of France as made and provided by the historians of Port-Royal. The hours given to study were of the shortest, for Sébastien chafed against the confinement within four walls. His wild, free life satisfied all the longings of his nature. He rode, he fished, he shot and hunted with the instinct of a born sportsman. He had hardly a friend of his own class, but he made friends for himself of gamekeepers and peasants, of poachers and fishermen, of smugglers and coast-guardsmen. He spent many a night far afield under the stars, engaged in some kind of sport, and crept into the house at daybreak before any of the servants were astir. The wanderers of the countryside, the *pillaver* with his little cart of foul rags, the peddler with his pack, the colporteur with his case of books—he conversed with all these, and was at home with them at once. He talked with them of that great city which they visited now and again, full of wonder and respect for its splendours, and which he knew and loathed.

By the time he had been two years at Pen-Hoël he loved the place and its surroundings with an intense love. There was not a bank or a coppice, a willow or a waterpool, a clump of Spanish chestnuts or an old wall feathered over with fern-fronds, which Sébastien did not know by heart. The gardeners and farm labourers, the grooms and gamekeepers, and all the villagers around loved him. He was as a king among them. If there had been need of a new Vendée, Sébastien Caradec could have raised a regiment. All the countryside would have flocked to the sound of his drum. Everybody loved the bold, frank, handsome, open-handed boy, except his father. Raymond Caradec could not forgive his son for the traitorous blood in his veins, for his involuntary share in the past. He had been his mother's companion in her vicious career—in her *dégringolade.* He had drunk of the cup of her pleasures, perhaps basked in the luxury of sin. The Count had never dared to question his son as to that past history. There were hideous pages in the boy's life which he shrank from opening. But sometimes, on those rare occasions when the father and son were alone together, Raymond Caradec would fall into a reverie, seeing with his mind's eye that past life with all its loathsome details—feasting, revelry, fine clothes, a thick, hot mist of wine-fumes and lamplight clouding the atmosphere of a gaudily-furnished saloon. Friends had told him something of his wife's existence in Paris—the money she had squandered, the train she had led. He asked no questions; he winced at the sound of his wife's name. But there are people who will put their finger-tips upon gaping wounds by way of friendship; and Raymond Caradec knew what manner of life the dead woman had lived. He associated his innocent son with all that horror and shame. What blessing could he hope from a boy reared in such iniquity? Yet there were times when the boy's frank outlook and noble face impressed him in spite of himself, and he was almost kind to his son. Unhappily, these intervals of fatherly feeling were of the rarest.

When Sébastien had been about a year and a half at Pen-Hoël, and had become, as it were, a living part of the hills and woods, forgetful of all the life he had known before he came there, the Count went to Paris with an old college friend who had dropped upon Pen-Hoël unexpectedly—from the stars as it were—one autumn night, and who, after staying three days at the château, tempted Monsieur Caradec to accompany him to the great city, where he had a wife and an apartment in the rue St.-Guillaume. It was late in October: the hops were picked, the apples were garnered, the sarrasin fields were brown and bare, autumn winds shrieked and howled round the old house as if they would have blown down its quaint old turrets, the

brazen weathercock groaned and scrooped in its iron socket, the solid old casements rattled and shook—a dreary season for the master of Pen-Hoël, who had long ceased to care for sport. Everybody would be coming back to Paris after the season of *villegiatura*. The theatres were opening. The town would be at its best. Raymond Caradec, who felt himself becoming prematurely old, a creature sunk in gloom and hopelessness, accepted the invitation, but with reserve.

'You and your wife will find me sorry company,' he said. 'I have let myself rust too long.'

'Never too late to rub the rust off,' answered Monsieur Lanion, his friend. 'My wife is a very good little person, and will do her utmost to enliven you.'

Thus urged, Raymond risked the experiment. He felt a little *dépaysé* for the first day or so amid the *bourgeois* comfort and home-like air of the apartment in the rue St.-Guillaume. He had never known what it was to have a home since his mother's death, and these handsome old rooms, in which the substantial Empire furniture was brightened by the graceful additions of womanly taste—lamps, flowers, books, piano, harp—had the air of a newly-discovered country, a hitherto unimagined paradise. The piano was Madame Lanion's particular function ; the harp belonged to her sister, a delicate, fair-haired girl of twenty, who had been left an orphan within the last three years, and had lived with her sister since her bereavement. The sisters were both musical. They sang and played duets for harp and piano.

Adèle de Guirandat was not a beautiful woman. She did not impress the stranger with her charms at a glance, or lead him captive with a smile and a word. She had a fragile elegance which pleased his fastidious tastes. She was reserved, without shyness, and after a little while, when he became interested in her, she seemed to him the fair embodiment of feminine purity. Her manners, her movements, her dress were all distinguished by that gracefulness which is the highest charm in a woman. Caradec did not ask himself whether she was good-tempered, warm-hearted, frank, brave—of those grander qualities which make the nobility of woman's character he thought but little before this quiet perfection, these outward graces of a young lady educated in a convent, polished and refined in the society of all that was most intellectual in Paris. Monsieur Lanion occupied an official post of some importance, was a man of some culture, and knew all the best people in both parties—Legitimist and Orleanist. Politics were tolerably smooth in Paris just now. The people were satisfied with their Citizen King, although they made their little jokes about him—his pear-shaped

countenance, his trick of bidding for cheap popularity, his little affectations of *bourgeoisie*, and that strain of avarice which is, after all, the universal fellow-feeling that makes the whole world kin.

Possibly, when Monsieur Lanion urged his old friend to take up his abode in the rue St.-Guillaume for a while, he may have had some dim notion of the thing which had come to pass. He may have told himself that the proprietor of Pen-Hoël, with his fine old château and an income which, although modest, was all-sufficient for the comfort and conventionalities of life in Brittany, would be no unworthy alliance for his sister-in-law. Adèle had been three years in Paris. She had been generally admired, but she had attracted no eligible suitor; and Lanion, who adored his wife, was beginning to be a little weary of this domicile *à trois*. He wanted to have the family hearth for himself and his Laure. They had no children, and were all-in-all to each other. Adèle was very sweet, but she was an incubus.

So when he saw Caradec interested, charmed, growing daily fonder, he did his uttermost to fan the flame. Yes, Adèle was quite the most amiable girl he had ever met with. She had all the perfections of Laure, with additional graces which were quite her own. There were not half a dozen young women in Paris who could play the harp as well as she did. A difficult, ungrateful instrument. And then, how she sang! *Mon Dieu*, what finish, what expression! Garcia had given her lessons after she came to Paris, and had almost wept at the thought that such a voice should be wasted in drawing-rooms, half appreciated by senseless people who knew nothing about music.

Caradec agreed with every word of this praise. He had listened with rapture to the harp which brought the white arms and slender waist of the player into such prominence. The voice in which she sang a ballad of Hugo's, or of Musset's—a little thing in Italian by he knew not whom—was sweetness itself. But was it possible that such an accomplished young lady would endure the monotony of a château on the edge of Brittany, would receive the addresses of a widower—a man grown old before his time, broken down by the burden of past sorrows, of intolerable memories?

'My dear fellow, I admit you were rather dismal when you first came among us,' answered Lanion, laughing at his friend's gravity; 'but you are improving daily. Stay a week or two longer, and you will be as young as the youngest of us.'

Caradec sighed and shook his head. But he yielded to his friend's urgency, and stayed in the rue St.-Guillaume. There was plenty of room for him in that spacious second floor *entre cour et jardin*. His host and hostess made much of him. They

took him to the Opera House, where 'Robert the Devil' was still a novelty. They took him to see Rachel, then in her zenith. She had just revealed the depth and grandeur of her powers in Phèdre, that one character which all the critics had vowed she would never be able to play. It was a less brilliant Paris than the glittering city of the Empire; but it was a very delightful city, nevertheless, and Caradec lingered there as amid scenes of enchantment.

One evening he took courage, and offered himself to Adèle. It was Madame Lanion's Tuesday, when all the nicest officials and a few of the choicest people in the world of art and literature came to drink weak tea, served at ten o'clock, and nibble sweet cakes, in the rue Saint-Guillaume. Adèle had performed upon her harp, had sung three of her little songs—her whole *répertoire* consisted of about six—and now they two were alone in the smaller salon, which was half a library, while the company were gathered round the wood fire in the larger room, talking politics. That inner room was dimly lighted by a pair of wax candles on the velvet-draped mantelpiece, and in that half-obscurity Raymond took heart of grace, and drew a little nearer to Adèle as she stood in one of her graceful attitudes, her elbow resting on the low mantelpiece, the beautiful arm shining like alabaster under the large gauze sleeve, the slender figure exquisitely set off by the broad waistband and buckle which girdled her white satin gown.

He asked her, in all humility, if she could marry a man with whom the freshness of youth was passed; if she could be content with life in a solitary country house.

'We are not quite in a desert,' he said apologetically; 'we have neighbours at Avranches, which is not ten miles off—rather an important town.'

She looked down, blushing a little, listening with an amused smile to his faltered apologies. She was no more in love with him than with yonder statuette of the Belvidere Apollo; but she was tired of making a third in her sister's household, and she had an inkling that her brother-in-law was getting tired of her. That sort of thing ought to finish, and there had been no one else to offer a speedy *dénouement*.

'You would bring your wife to Paris at least once a year, I hope, Monsieur,' she said, smiling, with lowered eyelids.

He caught her hand in his, and kissed it passionately.

'That means yes,' he said.

French people have no idea of long engagements. They despatch the doomed with an alarming promptitude. The Comte de Pen-Hoël left Paris next day to regulate his affairs in Brittany, returned to the metropolis in three weeks to sign the

marriage contract, and to be married at the church of St. Sulpice with all befitting solemnity. His wife's harp was packed and ready with her trousseau, and the corbeille containing the usual cashmere shawl, a set of amethysts and diamonds which had belonged to Caradec's mother, and some more modern jewels newly purchased, notably a gold bandeau for the hair set with emeralds, such as they had seen Rachel wear in Zaïre, below her gauze turban.

Raymond Caradec was a proud man the day he carried his young wife home to the old château—proud of having won a pure and perfect creature to be his companion, a being beside whose purity the sins of the dead woman lying in the cemetery at Montmartre were dark as the crimes of the Princess Dahut, guilty daughter of the good king Gradlan, the Arthur of Brittany.

They posted all the way from Paris to Pen-Hoël, and the journey was slow and costly. The fair young bride had a weary look when the carriage crossed the little bridge under the Norman portcullis which still guarded the château. Wintry mists veiled the country side. All was gray and chill save for the faint yellow light of a December sunset, with a gleam of red here and there upon the steel-gray river. Adèle shuddered. She had never been further from Paris than Fontainebleau in her life before, and Fontainebleau was Paris in miniature as compared with the villages through which she had passed on this long dismal day—queer old stone cottages, ancient crones spinning in doorways and windows like the wicked fairies in old story-books, peasant boys riding on cows, magpies, priests, a girl astride a donkey between a pair of heavily-laden panniers. Was she to live the greater part of her life among such barbarians? Already she had begun to speculate whether it would be possible to persuade her husband to sell Pen-Hoël and take an apartment in the Rue St.-Guillaume, or the Rue de Lille. Paris—her beautiful Paris—with its theatres and churches, its music and splendour! It was but a few days since she had left that lovely city, and she was pining to go back already.

Caradec had been observant of her all day, and had seen that she was neither pleased nor interested in anything she saw. They had breakfasted at Coutances, and spent an hour in the cathedral. They had stood on a height to see the Channel Islands yonder—Hern, and Sark, and Alderney—gray in a gray sea. They had stopped at Granville—another old church on a height, solitary sands, a shabby town; but the drive from Granville to Avranches, the ascent to the town on the hill, was lovely. Yet Adèle had admired nothing.

'I am afraid you are very tired,' said her husband.

'I have one of my bad headaches,' she answered languidly and he learned for the first time that she was subject to a chronic headache.

From this time forward the headache was established as a domestic institution. When Madame Caradec had her headache no one was to say anything to her, or expect anything from her. She was to look as miserable or as ill-tempered as she pleased. Nobody was to complain. It was only Madame's headache.

'I should have liked you to be well enough to enjoy the approach to Avranches,' said Caradec; 'it is such a picturesque drive.'

And now they were in the little park of Pen-Hoël. The carriage wound slowly up the hill, and there was the château in front of them. There had been a castle in the days of Charles of Blois—a feudal castle—in that fine position; and there were old walls and an old tower interwoven with the existing building, which dated from the time of Henry the Fourth. Adèle gave a piteous look when she saw the low ceilings and thick walls, the deeply-sunk windows and stone mullions. She detested an old house. Her only complaint against the Faubourg St.-Germain had been that it was not built yesterday.

But the old house with its dingy colouring, and ponderous, worm-eaten furniture of carved oak or walnut, was not the worst thing at Pen-Hoël. The appearance of that tall handsome lad who came forward shyly to greet his father and his father's bride was a much greater trial for Madame Caradec's somewhat difficult temper. She knew that there was a child of the former marriage; but she had pictured to herself a little fellow in the nursery, a baby that could give her no trouble. This tall, broad-shouldered, dark-eyed boy was a personage.

'*Mon Dieu!*' she muttered to herself; 'am I always to live in a trinity?'

She gave Sébastien the tips of her gloved fingers, and he looked at her with dark eyes full of doubt. The idea of his father's second marriage had been distasteful to him in the abstract: it was more than ever obnoxious now that he saw the lady.

'You can go to your usual amusements,' said Caradec, when he had shaken hands with his son, who had been waiting in front of the château for the last two hours to give his father a respectful greeting, inspired to this politeness by the good old priest, his tutor.

The boy perfectly understood the permission. He was not wanted in the newly-organised home any more than he had been wanted in the old one. He went off to his companion, the gamekeeper, and planned the next day's sport. He had his

supper in the kitchen that night, feeling too shy to enter the rooms occupied by the new mistress of Pen-Hoël. The kitchen was a mighty stone hall, with a fireplace as big as a room; gamekeepers, gardeners, and farm-servants had their meals there, and Sébastien was like a king among them. At his bidding the old men told their stories of gnomes and fairies, and crooned their old ballads, thirty or forty verses long, about the heroes and scourges of Brittany. The fare was of the roughest —hard cheese, harder cider, black bread; but the meals were gayer than in the stately old room yonder, with its dark oak panelling and carved furniture, its vessels of shining brass and silver, its old Rouen pottery.

Little by little it grew to be an accepted fact that Sébastien should take his meals with the servants. 'He liked it better,' his stepmother declared, when the old curé complained of this lapse into ignoble habits. He lived the best part of his life out of doors, and came home at all hours, his clothes bespattered, his boots coated an inch thick with mud. He was never in a condition to appear in the drawing-room or dining-room. 'And he has no more manners than one of those horrible cows which I am always meeting in your detestably-muddy lanes,' said Adèle.

The curé sighed and shrugged his shoulders. He had no faith in a woman who could let her husband's only son eat with the servants, and who did not love the cows and the deep rustic lanes of that romantic land. He took an early occasion to remonstrate with the father. But here he met sterner treatment. The Count looked black as thunder at the mention of his son's name.

'The boy is a born vagabond, a young savage, whom even my wife has failed in taming,' he said harshly. 'Let him go his own way.'

'Do you think Madame la Comtesse understands the boy, or has really tried to tame him?' asked the priest. 'I find him gentle enough.'

Monsieur Caradec smiled with his haughty, self-complacent air. The curé was too near the peasant class himself to be over-critical in matters of refinement.

'My dear Father Bressant, if you like the boy, so much the better,' he answered. 'Let him have his own way and live among the people he likes. I suppose he will be a soldier in a year or two, and the discipline of a barrack will take off his rough edges.'

This speech, faithfully interpreted, meant that Count Caradec cared very little what became of his eldest son so that he and his fragile wife were not plagued about him.

While Count Caradec's eldest son was growing up in solitude and neglect came the historic year of forty-eight. Behold, the good Citizen King and that saintly woman his Queen were cast out of their palace by the broad, bright river like a guilty Adam and Eve out of Paradise, and were fugitives on the face of the earth, flying as for their lives: King and Queen in hiding for eight days in a little pavilion yonder by Havre de Grace, waiting what time winds are unruly and captains doubtful for the opportunity of getting across to quiet England; fair young princess and her children hastening to Avranches with a view to sailing for Jersey; Duke de Nemours flying to Boulogne and crossing—at peril of his life in the teeth of a terrible gale—by the very steamer which has just brought over Cæsar and his fortunes in the form of Prince Louis Bonaparte, this time without the tame eagle.

Then followed a year of doubt and indecision, gloomy time for France, and gloomiest for Paris, where all along the Boulevards there was scarcely a balcony without its placard of apartments to let; where every one was dubious, not knowing what might happen next—sheep without a shepherd.

With November came the election of the President, and Prince Louis Bonaparte was proclaimed the chosen of the French people by five million votes, his most powerful rival, General Cavaignac, only scoring a million and a half.

It was the country, and not the town, which made Louis Napoleon master of France. And the magic of his name was the spell which brought the rural population marching to the sound of the drum—the mayor and the parish priest at their head—to cast their lot into the urn for the nephew of the Great Emperor. Horace Vernet and Béranger were the advocates who pleaded his cause with these simple hearts. There was scarcely a cottage in France that had not its cheap engraving of the 'Farewell at Fontainebleau'; scarcely a cottage fire by which had not been recited those pathetic verses wherein the grandmother tells her grandchildren the story of the great Emperor and his battles. Even in Brittany the sacred memorie of La Vendée were as nothing compared with the magical name of him who made France famous among the nations. Her little corporal, her invincible captain, her chosen and beloved of the long-vanished years when those who were old and dull to-day were young and glad.

In the little village of Pen-Hoël all the peasants went gaily to vote for the nephew of their hero, while Raymond Caradec came to the voting-place with grave and solemn countenance to cast in his solitary vote for Henri de Bourbon.

And thus Louis Bonaparte became master and ruler of

France in the teeth of the National Assembly, which had done its best to discredit his claims; and in the chill December twilight of that year of forty-nine, the lamps upon the tribune newly lighted and burning dimly, a man of middle height suddenly emerged from the crowd of senators and advanced to the tribune—pale, with marked features, heavy moustache, and the shadowy eyes of the fatalist and dreamer—to take the oath of fidelity to the Republic.

How sacred he deemed that oath, and how loyally he kept it was to be seen later.

Adèle had been married five years, and had borne her husband two sons; and she had been more or less an invalid during the whole period of her wedded life. There was nothing specific the matter with her. She had consulted learned physicians at Rennes and Paris. She had the frequent attendance of a family doctor from Avranches. Her malady was nameless. The faculty proclaimed her organically sound, heart excellent, lungs all that could be desired, liver conscientious in the performance of all its functions. Her only complaint was to fancy herself always ill. 'Madame s'écoute trop,' the Avranches doctor said. She was perpetually feeling throbbings and flutterings, sinkings and tremblings. Finding herself sole mistress of a fine old château in a solitary land, with twice too many servants and a devoted husband, the elegant Adèle had taken to hypochondria as the only amusement possible in such a situation. She wore expensive morning gowns, and lolled on a sofa all day. She trained her husband to wait upon her, to fly for her smelling-bottle, to spend a considerable portion of his life in carrying fans and footstools, down-pillows for the aching head, medicine bottles and glass measures. She was Virtue's self, a wife without a flaw; but she was not the pleasantest partner a man could have had. She was never out of temper, but she was often so ill that she must not be spoken to; her nerves were sometimes so highly strung that a step upon the parquetted floor caused her exquisite agonies. It was not to be supposed that such a sensitive creature could endure the presence of a hulking step-son smelling of badgers and other noisome beasts.

To hear Adèle discourse to her chosen friends upon the pains and perils of maternity made it seem a miracle that the world had ever been peopled.

'But then, I am such a fragile creature,' she added deprecatingly; 'you might blow me away with a breath.'

She was much too fragile to nurse her boys, or to perform any of those little services for them which are the delight of ordinary mothers. Madame Lanion sent her a nurse who had

nursed the infant of a duchess. No rough peasant woman of the district must be allowed to be foster-mother to Adèle's offspring lest they should grow up as coarse and common as their half-brother. The Parisian nurse was a fine lady, and gave herself intolerable airs in the Pen-Hoël kitchen, and talked of the Faubourg—meaning St.-Germain—as if there were no other quarter in Paris. Raymond Caradec saw all the arrangements of his home altered, his expenses nearly doubled by the more elegant manner of life which his wife insisted upon; but he made no complaint. He worshipped Adèle for those qualities which made her unlike the woman who had betrayed him. He accepted his life as she chose to make it, indulged her morbid, selfish fancies, idolized the children she had brought him, and was in all things admirable except in his neglect of Sébastien.

The time had come when his son felt that neglect in all its bitterness. The wild, free life, the woods, the sands, and rocks and sea, the peasantry, the priests, the custom-house officers, had lost none of their delight. He had no wish to be the pampered inmate of a drawing-room, to sit by a wood-fire reading a novel, or to listen to Madame Caradec's rare performances upon the harp. He wanted none of the indulgences or luxuries of a rich man's son. But he yearned passionately for a father's love. He wanted his rightful place at his father's side. He asked himself bitterly what sin he had committed to justify a father's contempt.

He had the pride of his race, the offended pride of one who has done no wrong, and who feels the sting of injustice. He could not fawn or flatter. He waited, with a kind of dogged patience, for the day when his father should awaken to the knowledge of the wrong he had done his son, and of his own accord should seek to make atonement.

While he was waiting in this spirit, half patient, half sullen, a catastrophe occurred which shipwrecked all his hopes and made the breach between father and son impassable.

The four-year-old boy and his three-year-old brother adored Sébastien. It was a horrible fact, the cruellest turn which fate could have played Madame Caradec; but this evil thing had come to pass. Her sons were ever so much fonder of their step-brother than of her. Vain that she clad them in velvet and lace and set them to play with ivory letters on the Aubusson carpet. They scampered off to the stables at the first opportunity, played havoc with velvet frocks and lace frills, and came back smelling of badger. Vain that she forbade donkeys and ponies as dangerous, denounced ladders and haylofts as

ungentlemanlike. They rode bare-backed at three years old, and were always climbing ladders when they were not climbing trees. The invalid mother seldom left her bed-room till noon, and rarely left her sofa in the drawing-room except to go back to her bed-chamber at night. The Parisian dry-nurse, who had succeeded to Parisian wet-nurse, was much too fine and much too lazy to run after her charges; so the boys did as they liked, and their liking was to be with Sébastien, who returned their love in liberal measure. He made them fishing-rods, being marvellously expert in all mechanical arts, and they went on long expeditions with him, and came back with laden baskets, which they fondly believed they had helped to fill. They were his companions in all his occupations, loved to stand at his knees when he was at work at any of those constructions in the way of dovecotes, rabbit-hutches, tumbrels, bird-traps, for which, in the opinion of the peasantry, he had a heaven-given genius. He built a windmill for one cottager, who had been saving up the necessary timber for many years, and who had grown too old and feeble for that great work in the meanwhile. Sébastien's windmill was one of the marvels of the village. His popularity was doubled by the achievement, and Raymond Caradec heard his eldest son's praises from every villager with whom he condescended to converse. But these were not many, as the lord of the soil held himself mostly aloof from his serfs.

Madame Caradec gave way to much feeble and fretful lamentation upon the half-brother's evil influence upon her sons. They would grow rude and rough like Sébastien—mere village boors like their brother.

'You see so little of Sébastien that you can hardly know whether he is rude or courteous,' answered Caradec, stung by these peevish complaints.

At the cruel answer Adèle melted into tears, and sank back almost fainting among her down pillows. She was not made to endure unkindness from one she loved; she might be as cruel as she chose to other people, but breathe one harsh word, and she drooped and languished like a delicate flower bending before hurtling winds; and Raymond Caradec, being stern truthfulness himself, was the perpetual victim of these small hypocrisies, and always ready to apologise for a rough word. His weak, selfish wife had boundless power over him. In vain did he argue with himself that his eldest son was not altogether fairly treated, that there were faults on both sides: a few tears, a little plaintive look from the fair young wife, quashed all his objections.

'You are not always here—you do not see'—she murmured

significantly; and on the strength of such vague hints, Raymond grew to believe that his son was brutal to the invalid step-mother whenever he, the master, was out of the way.

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## CHAPTER IV

### THE FURNACE FOR GOLD

THUS it came about that, although the little brothers throve and grew rosy in their companionship with the tall, dark lad, Raymond Caradec was willing to admit that Sébastien's society was dangerous to the children; and when, one autumn afternoon towards dusk, he found his wife in tears on account of the prolonged absence of her babies, he was quite ready to be angry with his eldest son as the cause of those tears.

'Sébastien took them out directly after breakfast, although Marie told him the morning was too cold for them,' whimpered Adèle.

'Cold! Why, my child, the weather is lovely.'

'I only know that I have been shivering all the afternoon, answered his wife, leaning out of her easy chair to spread her thin white hands above the wood fire. 'But cold or not, Sébastien has kept those dear children out all day, and no one knows where he has taken them or what he has done with them.'

Here she broke down altogether and sobbed hysterically as if it were as likely as not that Sébastien had gone far afield on purpose to lose the little ones in a wood like the wicked uncle in the story. It was the season of fallen leaves and robin-redbreasts.

'My cherished one, pray don't distress yourself!' implored Caradec, bending over his wife's chair. 'I have no doubt the boys are amusing themselves in the village, or in some orchard within half a mile.'

'They are not to be found within miles. I have sent all about the country in search of them—men on horseback. It seems that Sébastien harnessed the two donkeys to the little cart, and took a basket of provisions from the kitchen, and a bottle of wine, and cloaks and things, just as if he were running away with my darlings. Never, never, never to see their mother's face again.' More sobs with increasing symptoms of

hysteria ; and hysteria with Madame Caradec was an awful thing—a thing to be dreaded by all about her.

'He has taken the boys for a picnic, of course,' said Caradec, when he had soothed his wife into brief tranquillity. 'It is not the first time he has taken the cart.'

'A picnic in such weather—nearly the end of October!' gasped Adèle ; 'and they tell me he took wood and matches, as if to light a fire. He is the very spirit of mischief.'

More followed to the same tune in the deepening dusk. Matters grew worse when the lamps were lighted ; and as the night grew late Raymond himself became seriously alarmed. Scouts were sent in every direction ; but it was not till the late autumn dawn that the sleepless household were in anywise enlightened as to the fate of the three boys. At that bleak hour one of the mounted gamekeepers came back with the news that the little donkey-cart had been seen crossing the sands to Mont St.-Michel early in the afternoon of the previous day. The boys had doubtless slept at the little inn within the fortress walls. The tide was full when the gamekeeper received this information, and, instead of crossing to the rock in a boat to follow up the trail, he deemed it his duty to return and tell his master what he had heard.

Madame Caradec had been hysterical all night. Nurse and lady's-maid had had their hands full in attending upon her ; but she grew worse on hearing that the cart had been seen on those perilous sands. Her darlings had been swallowed alive in a quicksand. It was a hideous vengeance of Sébastien's. He was jealous of her children. He hated her. He was just the kind of boy to commit murder and suicide. He had it all in his face.

Raymond Caradec ordered his horse and rode off to the Mount, galloping across the low, level fields beyond Pontorson, past the waggons laden with sand from the spongy shores of the Couësnon, and picking his way over the sandy flats, out of which the rock rose like an Egyptian pyramid. There was no causeway between solid earth and the Mount in those days. The citadel stood solitary, aloof, girt by blue waves or shining sand. At this time in the morning the tide was going out, and Raymond's keen glance explored the sandy flat, from which the waves were slowly crawling, in search of the little donkey-cart with the three boys. If they had been prisoners at the Mount last night, overtaken by the tide, they ought to be on their way home now.

There was no sign of the cart on the sands, but Monsieur Caradec found it in the inn yard, and the donkeys in the inn stables. The boys had arrived there at two o'clock yesterday,

had explored the monastery and little town, and had picnicked on the sands. They had been seen making their wood fire and boiling their coffee while the tide was still far out, and this was the last anybody had heard or seen of them. And now it was time for Raymond Caradec's heart to sink and grow cold with an awful fear. Of all places on this earth that he knew there was no spot more dangerous to the rash or inexperienced rover than this sandy waste around St. Michel. Not a year passed but the sea had its victim in some imprudent traveller; and now his little children, the fair-haired babies he loved, had been devoured by that murderous sea. Of the eldest one he thought with only anger—bitter rage against the boy whose crime or whose folly had sacrificed the children he loved.

He talked to a dozen natives of the rock, all of whom told him the same story. The boys had been seen in the street, on the ramparts, and at the inn; but after four o'clock, when they picnicked on the sands, no mortal eye among the dwellers at Mont St. Michel had beheld them. They were to come back for the donkey-cart; but cart and donkeys were there to show that the tall youth and his little brothers had not returned. The natives shrugged their shoulders, and evidently apprehended the worst. It was a sad story. The lad was so good to his little brothers. He carried the youngest on his shoulder across the sands, a rosy-cheeked cherub, with golden curls flying in the wind. Those terrible *lises!* It was not the first time.

Raymond Caradec turned from them with a face white as death. He guided his horse out of the inn yard and through the citadel gate mechanically. Whither was he to go next, or what was he to do? He knew not; but with a vague notion of doing something, he rode slowly on to the sands as if to seek the particular spot which had engulfed his children. He knew not if they had been swallowed by one of those quicksands—the *lises*, as the natives called them, which abound on this level waste—or overtaken by the rising tide.

A barefooted peasant, a man who earned his living in the summer-time as a guide to travellers, and starved and idled in the winter, ran after the horseman.

'Sir,' he said, 'there is Tombelaine. The lad and his brothers might have gone there.'

'Not likely; but there is just a chance.'

Tombelaine is the twin islet which rises a little way from the Mount—a barren rock—the resort only of fishermen and the rare smugglers who attempt the perils of this most unpropitious shore. Tombelaine? Yes, the rock rose yonder, to the right, its base still washed by the tide. Raymond spurred his

horse to a gallop with his face towards that barren isle. The man rushed after him, shouting to him at the top of his voice to beware of the *lises*, to take the sand where it was hard and wrinkled, to avoid the soft ground, at peril of his life. The Count neither heard nor heeded, but galloped on towards the rock. Providence was kind to him as to drunken men in their peril. The waves washed against his stout charger's breast as he stood close beside the rock. Thank God! His call was answered by his eldest boy's deep baritone, and by two little piping voices that sounded like the treble cry of the seagulls.

They were alive. They stood shivering on the rock waiting for the tide to go down. They were very cold, those two little ones, and, oh, so hungry. The father took them from their brother's arms without a word, and clasped them to his breast there, with the water dashing about his horse's flanks and the salt sea wind blowing over him. He rode off with his children, hugging them, sheltering them with his strong right arm as they squatted in front of his saddle, and guiding his horse with his left hand. This time he took heed of the guide's warning. He walked his horse slowly, picking his way across the flat, choosing the long stretches of sand upon which the waves had left their print, crossing the river at a spot where the footsteps of the fishermen who had passed but a little while before served as a guide. Of the other son left behind on the rock he was hardly conscious. He did not draw rein till he was in front of the château of Pen-Hoël, where Adèle was standing watching for his return—a fragile figure robed in white, and wrapped in the Indian shawl that had been his wedding gift.

Never had he been so completely her slave as in this moment, when, in her joy at seeing her children, she flung her arms about her husband's neck and kissed and blessed him with an impassioned affection which she had never given him till to-day. They all went to the salon together, and mother and father sat in front of the wood fire, warming, comforting, and feeding the cold, hungry children. Then, when the treasures of a foolish woman's love had been poured out upon the restored children, came the bitterness of a weak woman's hate and jealousy for the eldest son. Why had he done this thing? Why had he exposed her darlings to the perils of cold, sickness, death—kept them starving all night upon a bleak unsheltered rock? Why, except to torment and torture her, whom he had always hated, of whom he had always been wickedly jealous.

'I have not forgotten the look he gave me when first I came here,' she said, vindictively.

The stepson came into the room while the stepmother was

bewailing his wickedness. Pale, haggard, with wild eyes and disordered apparel, he stood before his father.

'Sébastien, you have given my wife and me a night of agony,' said Raymond Caradec. 'What in the name of all that is evil was your motive for endangering the lives of these children?'

'If their lives were in danger, mine could not be particularly safe,' answered the young man bitterly.

He felt the slight implied in his father's speech. His own peril was ignored; he counted for nothing.

'If my brothers had perished, I must have perished with them,' he said. 'You don't suppose I took them to that rock with the intention of passing the night there?'

'But I believe you did,' cried Adèle, pale with passion; 'I believe you capable of any wickedness against me and mine. You would have left my innocents there to be drowned while you got away in a boat to Jersey or somewhere; only your villainous scheme failed, thank God!'

'Father,' exclaimed Sébastien, with his eyes aflame, 'do you believe this infamy of your son?'

'I believe nothing. I understand nothing, upon my soul. I don't know whether to think you a villain or a fool. I know what your mother was, and that the blood in your veins is bad enough.'

'Stop!' cried Sébastien, with a voice whose indignant power quelled even an angry father. 'Not a word about my mother. She is in her grave, and God is the only judge who shall pass sentence on her sins. We have been living very unhappily in this house for a long time. I have been in everybody's way. I am an outcast in my father's house, as Ishmael was in the house of Abraham—although, heaven knows, I never mocked at my stepmother—and I should be happier and better in the wilderness of the outside world. I should have turned my back upon Pen-Hoël before now if it were not for my little brothers, who love me.'

His proud young face softened as he turned to the little ones. They were looking on with eyes that had grown large with wonder, listening to every word, but understanding very little, only scared by a vague sense of unhappiness, the panic of an atmosphere charged with all bad feelings.

At the word 'love' from the elder brother's lips the childish faces flushed, and the eyes of the youngest brimmed over.

'Yes, yes, Sébastien, we both love you.'

'As for yesterday's business, it was an accident which might have happened to any one. We had our picnic on the sands, and were turning to go back to the Mount, when Frédéric saw

Tombelaine, and asked me to take him and his brother there—was it not so, my child?'

'Yes, yes,' answered Frédéric, the elder boy.

'At first I refused, for the tide was rising, and there was not much time for exploring the rock; but they both begged me. So we ran to Tombelaine, and the children went scrambling over the islet until they found a seagull's nest, and when they were tired of looking at the nest and the birds, they made me take them into the cavern, and while we were groping about in the dark there, playing hide and seek——'

'I wasn't frightened, was I?' cried Louis, the younger boy, 'though it was so dark. Frédéric was, though.'

'While we were at play the tide was rising, and when we came out of the cave the rock was hemmed round with water—no escape except by a boat. It was growing dark too, though it was not six o'clock, a mist rising. I shouted with all my might, stood on the highest point of Tombelaine, and shouted as long as I had any strength left—shouted at intervals of a few minutes until it was pitch dark, and then—well, my poor little pets were cold and hungry—we had left our basket with the remains of our dinner within reach of the tide. I had not so much as a bit of bread to give them. We crept into the cave, and I held them in my arms all night, and tried to keep them warm; and I sang to them and told them stories, and they managed to sleep a good deal in spite of the cold; and we heard the wind roaring and the waves sobbing. It was the middle of the night when the tide went down, and there was a thick white fog over sea and land. I knew the danger of attempting to cross the sands in such a fog, so I waited till morning, though it was a weary thing to sit there and hear the waters slowly creeping around us again in the winter dawn. The tide had not long turned when you rode out to us,' he concluded, addressing his father.

He had never taken his eyes from his father's face while he told his story. Not once had he glanced at his stepmother. He treated Madame Caradec and her accusations with scathing indifference.

But Raymond had not been unmindful of his wife while his son was speaking. He had noted her sighs and stifled sobs, her writhings of silent agony, her clutches at her children, clasping them to her breast convulsively as if to save them from a human tiger; and he knew that, if he forgave his son too readily for the folly that had cost a night of agony, he would be made to rue his indulgence. Hereafter he would be told that he had no real love for his wife or her children, that the son of his dead and gone Hagar was more to him than the offspring of this spotless Sarah.

The strong man was so completely under the dominion of the weak woman that in this crisis of his life Raymond Caradec thought not of what was just and right, but only of how he must needs act to save his wife's tears, to heal her wounded feelings. She had flung her arms round his neck an hour ago, in the hysterical joy of her sons' return, and had laid her pale, fair cheek against his as she had done but few times in their wedded life. His whole being was moved by the tenderness that little gush of love had awakened. It was of her, and her only, he thought as he turned coldly from his first-born.

'It was a foolish business, and you have given us an infinity of trouble,' he said.

Sébastien took up his hat and left the room without a word. His teeth were chattering, his lips were blue, his limbs ached from the constrained position in which he had sat half the night through. Nobody had offered to chafe *his* hands and feet before the wood fire yonder, or to administer wine *à la française* and warm food. The little children had been fed and comforted with luxurious fare, and had basked in their mother's lap before the merrily-blazing logs; but for this first-born—this Ishmael—well, there was the kitchen hearth, wider and warmer even than that of the salon, and as much food and wine as he could want. He had but to ask for it. There was all the difference. On one side, mother and father devouring their children with kisses, on the other the kitchen and the old servants, rough peasants for the most part, who could neither read nor write, but who were devoted to Sébastien.

Sébastien did not go to the kitchen for warmth and food. He went out of his father's house cold and hungry as he had entered it. He shook the dust of Pen-Hoël off his feet. '*C'est fini, ça,*' he said to himself. '*Va pour le désert.*'

The wilderness he thought of as he walked downhill to the bridge that spanned the moat was that great wilderness of which he had known something in his childhood—that stony-hearted stepmother, Paris, who could be hardly harsher to him than the fair-faced fragile being who had sobbed and sighed him out of his father's house and his father's love. Yes, he would go back to Paris, and work for his bread—work among common labourers if need were, and eat dry bread and drink sour wine; but the bread and wine should be of his own earning. By the sweat of his brow would he live, as his father Adam lived before him, by the work of his own strong arms and dexterous hands, rather than be a debtor for the decencies and luxuries of a gentleman's life to those who loved him not.

He walked quickly down the chestnut avenue, his heart beating loud with anger and wounded love; but when he had

crossed the old Norman bridge under the portcullis, he slackened his steps, and began to think more deliberately of his position. He explored his pockets, and found that his whole stock of worldly wealth consisted of a franc and a half—not a large amount with which to begin the battle of life. He was prepared to walk to Paris; but he knew that he must eat on the way there, and to eat he must have money. He could live on the humblest fare, sleep in the humblest shelter that offered itself; but even for black bread and a pallet under a peasant's thatch he must have money.

Father Bressant was the only man to whom Sébastien cared to apply in his need, and the village priest was not so rich as a village innkeeper or a peasant who had saved money; but he knew that the good curé loved him and would trust him, and that he had been for a long time secretly indignant at the scurvy treatment his pupil received from father and stepmother.

Sébastien went straight to the presbytery and told the priest his story unreservedly. The time had come at which he must leave his father's house. There had been no quarrel—he had used no hard words to his father or his father's wife; but there was bad blood between them, and it was best for all that he should go.

Father Bressant argued against this decision. It was a sin for a son to desert his father's house—to take upon himself to choose a life below his own rank in the world.

'It is the life to which my father has degraded me,' answered the young man. 'He has let me eat and drink with his servants; he has left me dependent upon servants for kindness. You know what kind of home I have had up yonder. Can you ask me to go back to it?'

The priest could and did so ask him, considering it his priestly duty; but when he found that the lad's will was iron in this matter, that he would go to Paris if he starved and begged upon the way—if he arrived there famished, and with bare, bleeding feet—the kind old man opened his purse and gave all its contents to his pupil, a sum of nine and a half louis. He forced the whole amount upon Sébastien, who declared that a quarter of it would be enough.

'You don't know how long it may be before you get work in Paris,' he said. 'Food and fuel are dear there; you will find it difficult to live. Why not try St. Malo, or Rennes?'

'Too near home; too cramped and narrow,' answered Sébastien. 'I want to be lost in a great crowd, forgotten in the wilderness of working-men, until I can make myself beloved and respected for my own sake. You know that, though I am no Solomon, I am pretty clever with my hands. I can use a carpenter's tools

or a mason's hammer. I shall get work in Paris, you may be sure, and shall learn more there in a week than I could learn in a year at Pen-Hoël. I shall disgrace nobody, I shall vex nobody, I shall be in no one's way. They set me down as a boor, an ignoramus, up yonder, Father Bressant,' with a jerk of his head in the direction of Pen-Hoël, 'because I have kept company with gamekeepers and fishermen, having no better company offered me, mark you ; but I feel that it is in me to be of some use in the world, and I would rather dig for sand on the shores of the Couësnon than lead the life I am leading now.'

'If you go to Paris, you will fall in with Republicans and Freethinkers ; you will forget your God,' sighed the priest.

'I think not, father. My belief in the God of truth and justice, of mercy and love, lies pretty deep in my heart. That faith has comforted me often when life went hard with me. I don't think it will be plucked out by the first bad company I may fall among. I have heard men sneer at all those things you have taught me before to-day, and have let their words go by me like the wind. I am not afraid of what Paris can do to me.'

Father Bressant sighed again and shook his head dolorously. He was an old man, a believer in Papal supremacy and the elder Bourbons. He hated Republicans and Bonapartists. And Paris was just now a divided camp, occupied by these two heresies, the Red Republicanism of Louis Blanc and Changarnier, the masked Imperialism of the Prince-President.

The priest gave Sébastien a kind of testimonial, or certificate of identity and good character, which might serve him in default of other papers when he went in search of employment ; and then the two, master and pupil, walked together for a mile or so on the first stage of the young man's journey ; and then they parted with eyes not innocent of tears. The outcast stood on a little knoll beside the road, looking back at the kind old man's bent shoulders and white hair falling upon his rusty black cassock. Sébastien watched the stooping figure until it vanished in the perspective of tangled bramble and chestnut and ash as the parallel lines of high unshorn hedges melted into one. Never till this moment had it occurred to him what an old man his tutor was. Should they two ever meet again ? he wondered. He must work his hardest, and make haste to restore the money borrowed to-day, lest the good old priest's declining days should be made harder for the lack of that little store. He must be sparing, too, and live on bread and water rather than impose upon his old friend's generosity.

Having this in his mind, he denied himself the indulgence of the diligence, when, on inquiring at Avranches, he discovered that the journey to Paris would cost him something over three

louis. The autumnal weather was capital for walking—albeit the shortness of the late October days was an inconvenience; but Sébastien was fearless and hardy, and was used to roaming after nightfall. He tramped somewhat wearily into the narrow streets of Villedieu, luminous with its furnaces and copper-mills, when the church clock was chiming the first quarter after ten, looking about him for a shelter which should be cheap and decent. It was nearly eleven before he found such a lodging; but later, as he advanced upon his journey from Villedieu to Thorigny, and that wooded heart of Normandy known as the Bocage, thence to Caen, and from Caen to Lisieux and Evreux, he grew cleverer in finding quarters for the night, and contrived to spend very little of Father Bressant's money; and he had only spent five-and-twenty francs in all when he entered the great city in the wintry twilight, friendless, houseless, unknown, but his own master, and possessed of the infinite riches of youth and hope.

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## CHAPTER V

### 'SWEET TO THE SOUL, AND HEALTH TO THE BONES'

RAYMOND CARADEC'S runaway son stood in the midst of the great city, where the river flows between the old Palace of the Medicis and the new Palace of the Legislature, spanned by historic bridges, darkened by the shadows of historic towers—a river whose waters, lapping against the granite quay with a little babbling sound like the prattle of a child, could tell of tragedy and comedy, death, sin, vice, hate, love, mirth, woe, were it a little more articulate—a river which, to the mind of the man who knows Paris, *does* recall a world of strange and terrible memories—a river which has run red with blood in the days that are gone. On that fatal vigil of St. Bartholomew, for example, when the streets were heaped with Huguenot corpses, and King Charles's cut-throats held their obscene orgies amid the slain, while the king himself looked out of his window in the Louvre yonder, arquebuse levelled, animating the butchery with his shouts, shooting at the fugitives who tried to swim the stream. The river will be flecked with sanguine stains once again before he who looks across the water to-night in this October of 1850 is much older.

To the young man from the green hillside across the quiet Couësnon Paris to-night seemed altogether a strange city. He had never taken kindly to the long, narrow streets of tall houses, or even to the glittering boulevard with its formal avenue of young trees. But he had come to Paris for a purpose—come to win his independence, to earn freedom, fearlessness, and the right to hope. He had fed for the last year or so upon stories of men who had entered Paris shoeless, shirtless, carrying a few rags in an old cotton handkerchief, a few sous for total reserve fund against starvation, and who, years afterwards, had become men of mark, a power in the city. He came stuffed to the brim with ambition; believing in himself, without conceit or arrogance, but with that unquestionable faith in his own force and his own capacity which cannot be plucked from the breast of the conqueror elect in the world's strife.

One who has studied the philosophy of Bohemianism has said that, from the hour in which the penniless man leaves off trying to get work and sits down in his hunger and his shabbiness, that man is lost. And in every great city there are two classes of men, the workers and the loungers; the latter with a natural bent towards the gutter; the former, brave, patient, heroic, and bound to win. The idler talks of bad luck. '*Pas de chance*' is his favourite motto. The worker seizes the twin demons of poverty and obscurity as the infant Hercules throttled the snakes that beset his cradle. The struggle may be long and weary. Life is a waiting race, in which the best horse is bound to win.

And now night was closing in, and the traveller had to find himself a shelter before the police grew troublesome. He was travelling at a disadvantage, without papers save that certificate of the parish priest's; and he had been sharply interrogated an hour ago at the Octroi. He remembered the names of two spots in Paris—the theatre at which his mother acted, and the rue de Shelas, the dreary street of tall, stone, barrack-like houses, a new street beyond the rue Poissonière, where his mother had died. He had hated the street with a deadly hatred; and yet to-night, friendless and alone, he turned his face automatically towards the last home he had known in Paris.

The Rue de Shelas seemed at the other end of the world to this tired wanderer, who had tramped so many weary miles under good and evil weather within the last week. He had made this last day's march longer than that of any previous day, and he was thoroughly beaten. He had bought himself a blouse and a coloured shirt at Caen, and his coat and fine linen were tied in a little bundle slung across his shoulder. He was

clad as workmen are clad, yet he did not look like a workman; and the blouses he met on his way glanced at him suspiciously as at a wolf in sheep's clothing. He left the glitter and dazzle of the lighted boulevard as soon as he could, and plunged into the labyrinth of murky streets, through which the interminable rue de Lafayette now pierces, a mighty artery leading from wealth to poverty, from idleness to labour, from daintiness and delight to hard fare and anxious hearts, from the *gommeux* to the blouse. It was long before Sébastien turned into the well-remembered street, which stood upon the verge of civilisation in those days—dreary waste places and houses newly begun surrounding it on all sides.

It was only eight years since Sébastien had looked his last upon that sordid quarter from the fly in which he sat, timid unquestioning, at his father's side. And yet he had an idea that everybody he had known in that period of his existence would be dead and buried. He expected to find old landmarks swept away. The early years of life are so long, heart and brain so ardent, outpacing Time the plodder, who becomes Time the galloper in after-years. The street was there; the house was there. Sébastien remembered the number, a big black figure of seven, painted upon each side of the door. He looked up at the front of the house, and it seemed to him like the Tower of Babel: windows above windows, lighted and dark, curtained, uncurtained. The house was there, but the people he had known were dead most likely—dead or gone away. He rang the bell, and the door was opened by some invisible means, whereupon he entered, and beheld a short, middle-aged, slatternly woman sitting at a table in a little room on the left of the stone passage. It was exactly the same figure he used to see there in days gone by—the same face, not older by an hour, it seemed to him—the greasy black gown, the large sallow face surmounted by a red cotton kerchief arranged as a cap, the long brass earrings. It was the same fat Jewess who had kept the house and tyrannised over the lodgers. But although Sébastien remembered Madame Rigol, the portress, that substantial matron had utterly forgotten him. The *gamin* of eleven, too frail and small for his years, had developed into a broad-shouldered youth of nineteen, six feet two, with the limbs and carriage of an athlete.

'Can I have a room here?' the young man asked; whereupon Madame Rigol, as in duty bound, took out a greasy ledger, and put the stranger through a kind of catechism before she would allow him the privilege of admission to that stony paradise.

He answered the questions exactly as he liked, drawing freely upon his imagination; and Madame Rigol put down what he told her in a purely mechanical way. His name?

Ishmael. Christian name? Ishmael also. Curious! but Madame Rigol was used to queer names in that greasy register, and she put down 'Ishmael Ishmael' without a word. When it came to the question of papers, she put 'S.P.' *(sans papiers)*, and the business was settled. But her face and manner became keen and eager when she asked him for a month's rent, eighteen francs, in advance; and this given, she was perfectly satisfied.

She took a particular key from a board adorned with almost as many keys as a pianoforte, and went panting up the winding stone staircase to show the new lodger to his room. The odours upon that greasy stair were almost unendurable to the young man whose nostrils still remembered the fresh, sweet air of fields and hedgerows, the salt breath of the sea. He felt that life must be terrible in such a den. But he need come there only for the night's rest, he argued with himself. He would have the whole of Paris for his dwelling-place by day. A man must have a shelter were it never so bad. And he had made up his mind to be sparing of good Father Bressant's cash. Poverty must not be over-nice.

Madame Rigol panted on, getting more asthmatical with every stair, till she opened a door on the fifth story, and ushered the new lodger into a bare little whitewashed den, with an old wooden bedstead and the sparest provision in the way of furniture. But there was a stove, on which the portress put some stress, as indicating an excess of luxury, and there was a window through which the wintry stars were shining. The room had not been occupied for some time, and felt cold and damp; but there were no foul smells here, and Madame Rigol volunteered to light a fire for the traveller, and even to make him some coffee. The lad's handsome face and frank manner made her kindly disposed to him. She went downstairs to fetch materials for fire and coffee while Sébastien surveyed the dark outside world from the window.

Lamps glimmered here and there in the darkness below. He saw the external boulevard yonder—a long gray line—and beyond lay that dreary border-land of waste and squalor which in those days stretched between the outskirts of the town and the fortifications—that master-work of the Citizen King's reign. master-work which had cost the king his popularity. It was a dismal quarter of the town. Yonder, folded in the shadows of night, lay the cemetery of Montmartre, the field of rest, Sébastien could only distinguish the spot afar off by the darkness which brooded over the place of graves. She was lying under those shadows—that unhappy mother, the sinner, lost on earth, to be redeemed, he hoped, in heaven: for if a future state be needed for the good, how much more for the sinners—

not for their punishment, but for their reclamation! Sébastien thought of his dead mother to-night with deepest sadness. She had sinned; she had outraged her husband, the common law of morality. Yet, in her first fall, might there not have been some blame due elsewhere? His father was a hard man. There were times when Sébastien had told himself that the master of Pen-Hoël had a stone instead of a heart. He was tender enough, nevertheless, to the weak, self-indulgent second wife. He had grown senile in middle age, the slave of a selfish woman's feeble prettiness.

Madame Rigol came in presently puffing like a steam-engine, but beaming with good nature. She was of the college-bed-maker's temper, and liked a young bachelor, for whom she could perform those small services which are rarely unremunerative. She explained to Sébastien as she lighted the fire and brewed the coffee that any service she rendered him in this way would be a question apart. The rent was paid to the landlord; that was a fixed sum; no profit accrued to her therefrom. But if it were in arrear, by all the sacred names in the calendar, was not she (Madame Rigol) made to suffer? As a stranger in Paris, perhaps Monsieur would like her to provide his breakfast every morning. It would be but a matter of a few sous.

Sébastien thanked her, but declined the favour.

'I shall have to live as other workmen live,' he said, 'and I must go out at daybreak. I shall breakfast anyhow—anywhere.'

She asked him what his trade was.

'A mason,' he answered boldly.

'Monsieur is a *gâcheur*, no doubt; he is too young, surely, to be a *limousinant*,' ejaculated Madame, scrutinising him sharply.

His hands were bronzed and roughened by an outdoor life, broadened by a good deal of amateur carpentering, but they were not the hands of a stonemason.

He had not the faintest notion what these technical distinctions meant, so he only nodded his head and knelt down by the stove to warm his hands.

'There was a theatre somewhere hereabouts—the Escurial!' he said.

Madame Rigol threw up her hands. A theatre! but yes, an altogether admirable theatre; but it had failed three years ago. The manager had spent too much on his fairy spectacles, people said. And there had been lions, tigers, rope-dancers, a circus, what you will. *Pas de chance!* The poor man was now at Clichy, and the Escurial had become a *café-chantant*.

'Ah!' Madame sighed, and stuck her arms akimbo, 'the loveliest woman that ever walked those boards lived and

died in this house. She had but one fault, the poor, dear soul!'

Sébastien bent his head lower over the little black stove, and said not a word. But when once Madame Rigol was fairly launched on the flood of talk, she required no assistance to keep her going.

'Oh, but she was a lovely creature, a magnificent woman!' she exclaimed. 'A little *passée*, perhaps, when she came to this house. She had *lived*. She had occupied a palace in the wood beyond Passy. Her carriages, horses, diamonds, laces, cashmeres—splendid! fit for a princess! And then there came an end of all that. She was of a passionate nature, and wine maddened her. She quarrelled with a millionaire—twice millionaire—who adored her; and when she came here she could not live without her little taste of cognac. It was a slow poison, and I saw her die by inches.'

'What became of her maid?' asked Sébastien.

'What, you knew them?' exclaimed the portress.

'She must have had some kind of servant,' answered Sébastien, neither admitting nor denying.

'Naturally. She had a companion—a servant, if you will—Lisette Fontaine. Lisette acted *soubrettes* at the Escurial. She was the delight of all the *gamins* in the faubourg. They called after her as she walked along the street. That is popularity, mark you. She left this house soon after Madame's death, and took a smarter lodging nearer the theatre, and afterwards she went to the new theatre at Belleville.'

'Is she there now, do you suppose?' asked Sébastien, eagerly.

He would have given a great deal to see Lisette—not altogether a perfect woman, perhaps. But she had been almost his only friend in those sad early days which ended in the gloom of death within these walls.

'No. She left the theatre a year ago. Some say that she married a *charcutier* in the quarter, others that she eloped with a nobleman. I have never been able to find out what became of her.'

Sébastien left his coffee-pot on the stove, and went out into the streets to buy himself some supper. He would not be treated like a fine gentleman by Madame Rigol. He wanted to cater for himself, and rough it like the commonest labourer in Paris. That rough beginning was a feature in the programme of all those successful careers which he had heard of.

It was growing late, but there were shops still open in this squalid quarter—a wine shop among others, which was also an ordinary at which workmen dined off a substantial meal of soup and meat, with bread included, for seven sous. Sébastien—

henceforth Ishmael—went into this little eating and drinking house, and took a supper of bread and cheese while he listened to the conversation round him. Presently he ventured to talk to some workmen who were smoking and drinking cheap red wine at the table where he sat. Could they tell him anything about the masons of Paris? Where could a man get work?

'Are you a skilled mason?' asked one of them.

'No; but I am strong, and I am not afraid of work.'

'That means you have never handled a hammer in your life,' said the man, inclined to sneer. 'You may get employment as a bricklayer's labourer, perhaps, to hand the bricks or to mix mortar—*gâcheur* or *garçon* they call him. A *garçon* earns as much as three francs a day. But even that is difficult for a stranger.'

'I am not afraid of difficulty,' answered Ishmael.

The man told him where to look for work; and he was out next morning at daybreak, visiting all the new constructions of the quarter. It was not till he had wandered as far as Belleville that he got a promise of employment. There were hands enough for the job at present; but the foreman liked the look of the young stranger's broad shoulders, and he should take the place of the first *gâcheur* who chose to *chômer*. Ishmael waited about all day, looking at the work going on, and familiarising himself with the duties of a *gâcheur*. He dined on the *ordinaire* at the little wine shop, sitting at the same table as before, and beginning to feel accustomed to the place. It was not so terrible an ordeal to him to descend into this lower grade, as it must have been to a spoiled favourite of fortune. He had associated with peasants in his own home; but these Parisian workmen seemed to him creatures of a coarser clay. They were infinitely cleverer; but their cleverness was unholy, devilish. They believed in nothing—neither in the goodness of God nor of man. They scoffed at all sacred things in the past and the present.

Political feeling ran high. The Republic was not Republican enough to please the majority. There were a few Bonapartists who would like to see the old Imperial eagle spread his wings over the greater part of the civilised world once more—who wanted the wars of Italy and Egypt, Germany and Spain over again. But these were in a weak minority. There were malcontents who had never forgiven the closing of the national workshops; others who abused Louis Blanc for having promised a millennium which he was unable to realise.

'Charlatans all,' said one. 'What can these white-handed gentry know of the rights of labour? Working men will never be properly governed till a working-man is President.'

'Down with Presidents! What do we want with a President?' cried another, growing husky over his quart of wine at twelve sous and his garlic sausage. 'Your President is only a monarch in disguise. He is a leech who sucks the blood of the working-man. To-day his ministers modestly ask for two million francs out of the public purse—to-morrow they will ask twice as much. A few years ago he was an adventurer in America, dependent upon Louis Philippe's bounty; after that a prisoner at Ham; and then a gentleman at large in the streets of London, waiting upon fortune. And now he and his friends—Morny and Fialin, *soi-disant* Persigny—have all the trump cards in their hands. He has the army at his orders—can shoot us all down whenever the fancy seizes him. The Government of France should be a great confederation of working-men—a small minority of men who work with their brains, an enormous majority of men who work with their hands—every man to have a direct influence upon the legislature, every man——'

'If there were no Court, the higher branches of trade would stagnate,' said a cabinet-maker. 'Whether it is at the Elysée, or the Tuileries, we must have a Court. They say that, if the Prince-President were Emperor, and had things his own way, trade would be better than it has been since the time of Louis XIV.'

This provoked unanimous derision. It was the *bourgeoisie* who had a hankering for the glitter and swagger of an empire, not the working classes. What they wanted was trade union, otherwise trade despotism, international societies, syndicates, co-operation, the power to dictate terms to their employers.

Sébastien, otherwise Ishmael, sat still and heard everything. His eager, receptive intellect caught the spirit of the present moment, steeped itself in the surrounding atmosphere. He was of good blood, bore an ancient name; but pride of race had shown itself to him on its darker side. He was ready to be as much a leveller as the strongest Democrat there. He listened and believed the worst that was said against the man who held the reins of the state chariot—always a hated personage with one particular section of the Parisian world. He, who had nothing to look to but labour to win him a place in the world, friends, fortune, fame, was ready to exalt the nobility of labour, to assert the rights of the working-man as against heaven-born generals and senators paid by the state.

Ishmael was on the ground at Belleville at six o'clock next morning; and before ten he was taken on to the works in the capacity of a *gâcheur*, the foreman instructing him in the rudimentary arts of that office. The Parisian workman is given to *chômage*, rarely works more than four days a week, and a

vacancy of this kind is not long in arising. Thus, before he had been three days in the great city, Sébastien found himself in the way of earning his bread. He was to be paid two francs and a half a day for his labour, and he was to give one franc out of the two and a half to the foreman for his bounty in taking on an untried hand, a youth without recommendation or papers. But the gain of thirty sous a day was a solid fact, and Sébastien felt that he had passed the first mile-post on the long high-road that leads to fortune.

Had he come to Paris crowned with laurels from a provincial university, rich in medals and diplomas, the writer of a prize poem, the discoverer of a new planet, the inventor of a new mode of locomotion, charged with science or poetry as with the electric current—in a word, a genius, he would inevitably have spent the first few years of his city life in rags and starvation; perhaps to end his days untimely by a few sous' worth of charcoal, or a leap from one of the bridges. But as he was passing ignorant, and brought only his youth, his strength, and the cunning of his hands to the great labour market, he obtained employment immediately.

He not only found a place in the mighty wheel, but he kept it. He was sober where other men were given to drink—he was earnest, patient, industrious, ambitious, among men who, for the most part, were idle *flâneurs* on the boulevard, or loungers in the street—for the Boulevard de la Chapelle and the Passage Ménilmontant have their idlers as well as the Boulevard des Capucines, or the Place de la Madeleine.

He was scoffed at for his virtues, suspected for his superior air and manners, his reserve as to his antecedents. He was called Mouchard, Orleanist, Chouan in disguise; but he held his peace and went his way, offending no one, yet with a look of reserved force which indicated that it were not over-safe to be offensive to him. To the fellow-workmen who were inclined to be friendly he was civil, listened to their wrongs and discussed their claims and the privileges for which they clamoured. Little by little he caught the tone of his surroundings, and was almost as Parisian as his companions; but he never sank to their level. Instinctively, without a hint from the man himself—save that implied in the name which he bore—they penetrated the secret of his existence. He was a gentleman by birth, the cast-off son of a noble father. They called him the marquis, not in derision, for at nineteen he had the tone of a man born to be the leader of men. He did not long remain a *gâcheur*, condemned to stir lime and sand in a smoking heap. He showed himself skilful enough to be set to better work before he had been three weeks in the employment of the Belleville builder. The work upon

which he was engaged was the erection of a block of workmen's houses, the beginning of a mighty boulevard, great white stone mansions rising gigantic from the midst of a broad plateau, fringed on the further side by the squalid courts and alleys of Ménilmontant; wooden sheds, houses of plaster and canvas, the dens and lairs of abject poverty and reckless crime—seething boil-pot of want, vice, disease, misery, into which the police made an occasional raid in pursuit of some arch-offender at peril of their lives.

The builder was not slow to notice a youth who would work, who worked as if his muscular arm delighted in its labour, as if the choral swing of the hammer were to him as the melody of a bridal song. He picked Sébastien out from the ruck, heard his story—hypothetical story—from the foreman, and observed him afterwards with a keener interest. After all, there is something in good blood, and when a gentleman does take it into his head to work, Jacques Bonhomme is handicapped against him. This was what the builder said to himself as he watched the muscular form—straight, slim, and tall—the finely-shaped head so loftily posed upon the neck of a young Alcides, the clearly-cut yet massive features, marked brows, aquiline nose, falcon eye, a mouth firm as if moulded out of marble. No common workman this, assuredly, and yet he lived as the other men lived, went to his seven-sous ordinary, or his *tapis franc*, after his work, and had a nest high up in one of those dreary barracks yonder, near the new hospital, which had been built with the bequest of a benevolent lady, by name Laborissière.

One of Sébastien's first acts on finding himself in the way of earning his bread was to send Father Bressant the bulk of his money. There was a deficiency of two louis and a half for the month's rent and the expenses of the journey, but this sum Sébastien meant to make good out of his savings before he was many months older. Life is passing cheap in a great city to vigorous, temperate, self-denying youth. Nasmyth, a young man reared in the comfort and elegance of a successful artist's household, had the courage to live the first year of his London life upon ten shillings a week—a voluntary sacrifice to the spirit of manly independence, since larger means were well within his reach—and, in so doing, set an example to industrious youth which should endure for all time—a nobler thing than even the hammer which made his name for ever famous. And Sébastien Caradec had the Nasmyth temper, the love of mechanical work for its own sake, the eye and the hand of the artist in stone or in iron.

## CHAPTER VI

### 'THE END OF THAT MIRTH IS HEAVINESS'

TIME out of mind the Faubourg St.-Antoine has been the quarter of furniture dealers and furniture makers. Of late years there has been an invasion of German workmen in the quarter, to the detriment of native talent; but in 1850 the *ébénistes* of Paris were, for the most part, Frenchmen who had succeeded to the primitive and scarcely improved tools of Boule and his sons. Here and there, even in these latter days, a native of Paris holds his own against the thrifty hard-working and hard-living square heads, and, by the delicacy of his workmanship and the grace of his designs, demonstrates that the glory of the French *ébéniste*, the artist-artizan, whose work was once renowned all the civilized world over, has not utterly departed.

Such an one was Père Lemoine, a man well on in his seventh decade, more or less of a drunkard always, and betimes an idler, but an artist to the tips of his finger nails. Had Père Lemoine abjured the bottle and worked steadily in the years that were gone, he would have occupied a very different lodging from that wretched ground-floor den looking into the yard of a huge barrack-like pile between a patch of waste land and a little cluster of filthy courts and alleys, the remnants of a past age—alleys that had seen the fall of the Bastille and the days of the Red Terror; alleys in which the glorious memories of July were still fresh, and which had sent forth their contingent of revolt in '32 and in '48. Père Lemoine might have been at the top of the tree, an illustrious ornament to the furniture trade, said the dealers and the middle-men who knew the man and his work. But for that man who will only work when driven by absolute want, who loves not his art for its own sake, and who would rather wallow among a herd of other wallowers in some low drinking cellar than sit beside the cheery hearth of a prosperous home, there is no hope. Upon the downward path which that man treads there is no end but the pauper's grave.

Père Lemoine might have been a master in the trade, and he was a slave—a rich man, and he was a beggar; but he had taken his own way of living, and he was wont in his cups to defend his choice between the two great high roads of life. Well, he would argue, he was as poor as Job. There were men with not a tithe of his talent who had made fortunes; but what would you?—it was not his nature to be a drudge. The man

who makes a fortune by his trade is your stolid, mindless mechanic, your mere machine of a man, your sordid plodder, who never shares a measure of vitriol or a litre of little-blue with a friend, or takes a night's pleasure—a fish-blooded creature, content to starve and pinch himself and his family, and to toil early and late for thirty years or so in order to be rich at the dull end of his dreary life, when such poor senses as he possessed at the beginning are half-dead within him.

'I don't envy such a slave his frock-coat and his fine house at Asnières, or his money in the funds,' exclaimed Père Lemoine contemptuously, lolling over the stained old marble table at his favourite *brasserie*, 'The Faithful Pig.' 'A man who has not enjoyed friendship, good company, a song or a dance, good wine, and his *polichinelle* of cognac now and then at a merry rendezvous like this—such a man, I say, has never lived. *Nom d'un caniche!* what should I do with a frock-coat or a villa in the suburbs? I detest the country, and I love to take my ease in my blouse and my slippers. I have worn a frock-coat in my day—I who talk to you; and I tell you that the day is not far distant when we shall all wear blouses, when there will be no more fine gentlemen, and the frock-coat will go the way of red heels and hair powder—to the gutter, to the rag-heap, with all such trumpery! There is no true nobility but in the man himself. Thews, sinews, heart, brains—there is your only patent of rank.'

Not much nobility in the speaker sprawling across the table in that low den of 'The Faithful Pig'—an inner and sacred apartment devoted exclusively to regular customers. And such customers! There were men in dubious linen and sham jewellery, tawdry, fine, audacious, whose only trade was iniquity. There were girls still in the very dawn of girlhood, yet steeped to the lips in the knowledge of evil, hovering near the crowded tables and exchanging infamous jests with the drinkers: shabby finery, slipshod feet, glassy eyes, a hectic flush upon hollow cheeks—the livery of vice, the stamp of early death; and amidst the Babel of voices, the crescendo of oaths, the reek of coarse tobacco and coarser spirits, there sounded the melancholy strains of a cracked tenor, as an old *cabotin*, at a table in the corner—thirty years ago a famous opera-singer and spoilt darling of duchesses—sang a sentimental ballad about the old house at home and the mother's grave to a little circle of half-tipsy amateurs. The fouler the atmosphere, the viler the place and the people, the more certain was the success of that plaintive ditty. The old *cabotin* had lived upon it for the last seven years, ever since he left off trying to exist respectably as a teacher of singing—*coureur de cachets*—in the Faubourg St.-Germain,

It was in this low haunt that the *trolleur* spent his evenings —for him veritable *noctes ambrosianæ*. After all, the atmosphere of man's happiness does not depend upon the laws of abstract beauty, or who would not set sail for the spicy isles of the Indian Ocean, or the silent forests beside the Amazon? A man's idea of happiness is the life which suits him best; and to drink, and talk, and laugh, and denounce the powers that be in a low tavern was Père Lemoine's ideal existence. He came to 'The Faithful Pig' with alacrity every evening, in fair weather or foul. He left late in the night with fond regret. There were nights, indeed, when he never left at all, but lay all his length among the sawdust beside the pewter counter, *cuvant son vin*, till the cold, gray dawn stared at him through the holes in the shutter, and the *garçon* came, sleepy and unwashed, to open the windows and broom away the traces of last night's orgy.

Père Lemoine, taking his life thus easily, had never yet been able to extricate himself from the clutches of the middle-man. He worked as he liked, when he liked, in his own den. When he had finished a piece of furniture—cabinet, escritoire, *bonheur du jour*, as the case might be—he summoned his agent and ally, an Auvergnat, known in Parisian slang as a *charabia*, who put the article on his truck and carried it round to the furniture dealers, to dispose of it for the best price he could get; and then there was played, over and over again, a neat little comedy in three acts, wherein the *trolleur* enacted the pigeon and the *charabia* the hawk—a little plot so transparent that old Lemoine, who was no fool, must have seen through it after very few repetitions; only it suited his temper better to be duped over and over again, to be the prey of an ignorant peasant who had begun life as a shoeblack on the Boulevard du Temple, than to work hard and live temperately.

The first act of the comedy consisted of two scenes. Scene 1, the departure of the *charabia* in the morning with the piece of furniture, cheery, jocund, full of hope; scene 2, the return of that faithful Auvergnat at eventide, gloomy and despairing. The furniture trade is going to the dogs, he declares. France is on the eve of a revolution, and people are afraid to furnish houses which may be consumed in the general bonfire next week. He has hawked that escritoire, a masterpiece, all over Paris, and not a dealer would bid for it. End of act i.

Act ii. consists of a single scene: return of the *charabia* three days after to say that he has found a dealer who will give just half the price Lemoine has asked for that escritoire. Lemoine, in low water, but not quite run dry, declines.

Act iii. occurs a week later. By this time Lemoine has

exchanged his last sous for cheap cognac, alias vitriol, and is an easy prey for the Auvergnian hawk. The benevolent *charabia* comes to offer a kindness. He is only a poor messenger, a hewer of wood and a carrier of water; he cannot pay as the rich merchant would pay, he does not want the furniture at all, and if he offers anything for it, he does so out of pure good nature, to oblige his employer. He will not offer as little as that miserly dealer in the Rue Vivienne, a man who has half the nobility for his customers; no, he will give ten per cent. more than that Harpagon offered. Lemoine, languishing for more vitriol and the intellectual society of 'The Faithful Pig,' accepts the offer, parts with his handiwork for half its value, and thus affords the *charabia* the opportunity of growing rich and blossoming some day into a prosperous furniture-dealer in the Faubourg St.-Antoine.

Naturally, this little comedy cannot be played too frequently. The *charabia* must sometimes perform his commission with approximate fidelity. But the game may be played a good many times in the course of a year with such a man as Père Lemoine, whose alcoholised brain has long lost the capacity for remembering the details of a year's existence. '*Vogue la galère*' is the drunkard's motto.

The Lemoines, husband and wife, had lived in that ground-floor den in the rue Sombreuil for nearly forty years. The house had been built not long after the Terror, while the fall of the old fortress prison-house yonder was yet green in the memory of those who watched the barrack-like pile rising from the dreariness of a level waste. Père Lemoine could just remember the wreck of the Bastille. The roar of cannon and the cries of a maddened crowd were the earliest sounds he could recall as he looked backward along the cloudy avenue of the past. The picture of those days when he was a barefooted little *galopin* at his father's knees seemed far more vivid than that of ten years ago. He was a married man and a father long before the Revolution of July, 1830, which drove Charles X. into exile and gave France her Citizen King. He and his wife were among the crowd at the review on the Boulevard du Temple, when Fieschi's infernal machine exploded and Marshal Mortier fell dead by the side of his king.

There was nothing that Père Lemoine remembered in his life better than the building of the Rue Sombreuil. He had played as a barefooted *gamin* among the builder's rubbish, the stone-dust and shavings, had watched the carpenters at work and the *gâcheur* mixing his mortar, had seen the tall white houses rise stone by stone out of the ground. His father was an *ebéniste* like himself, working independently at his own

goodwill, just as Père Lemoine worked now ; and as soon as the boy was old enough to hold hammer or chisel, he began to learn his father's trade. There was an elder brother, a soldier, following the fortunes of the First Consul, and there was a sister who worked at a great military outfitter's in the Faubourg du Temple, and who came home at night with arms and fingers aching after ten hours' stitching at serge coats and trousers.

It was a great epoch for the Lemoine family when they moved into the ground-floor rooms on the south side of the big white house. It was all so clean, so white, so dazzling, such a contrast to the narrow alley from which they emerged—a darksome passage where all the houses looked as if they were on the point of falling into each other's arms, a passage steeped in the foulness of centuries, reeking with indescribable odours. In this new white barrack all the sanitary conditions were as vile as they could be, no one knowing or caring about sanitation in those days. But the house was new, and foul odours had not had time to grow.

The Lemoines were prosperous in those early days of Consulate and Empire, prosperous because industrious and temperate. Pierre's father was a first-rate workman, and although it pleased him to be independent and to supply the dealers at his own pleasure, he was regular in his habits, and turned out plenty of work in the year. At twenty young Lemoine married a neighbour's daughter, and took his wife home to the family nest. There was a slip of a room off the living room, which did well enough for the young couple. The elder brother was otherwise accommodated far off in a foreign grave. He had fallen at Auerstadt, and his sword and a smoky wreath of immortelles hanging above the chimneypiece, amidst Mère Lemoine's *batterie de cuisine*, were the only tokens left of his existence. The mother owed her dead boy's sword to the thoughtful kindness of a young officer, who had since that time trodden the same dark road, and found a grave on the great highway to Russia.

When the Citizen King came to rule over his loving subjects, Père et Mère Lemoine the elder were both dead, and Pierre and his wife lived in the Rue Sombreuil with their only child, a pale, graceful girl of nineteen, with large violet eyes, and chestnut hair which was the admiration of all the gossips in the neighbourhood. Pierre and his wife were known as *père et mère*, and the last generation was forgotten.

Mère Lemoine and her daughter did not get on very happily together. The mother was a person of fretful disposition, given to tears, and not innocent of a liking for wine and spirits. She

was not a confirmed drunkard in those days, but was just beginning a system of secret tippling which must inevitably lead to a bad end. Jeanneton, the daughter, was fond of pleasure, and somewhat vain of her pale, fair prettiness, which had won her too many outspoken compliments from students and clerks as she went to her work across the river yonder, in the Quartier Latin, a dangerous neighbourhood for youth and beauty in those days.

Père Lemoine had apprenticed his daughter to a clear-starcher in a good way of business in a dull, shabby street near the Rue de Fleurus ; but dull and shabby as the street was, it boasted one of the most popular restaurants in the students' quarter, a house called 'The Pantagruel,' in which all the quick-witted dare-devils of the Sorbonne and the Maison Dieu loved to assemble, and where they made and unmade dynasties and governments, or fancied they did, which was almost the same thing.

At first Jeanneton rebelled sorely against her apprenticeship to the art of clear-starching ; it was killing, cruel, abominable, she told her parents. There was no other trade in all Paris that would have been so hateful. It was spirit-breaking drudgery to stand stooping over an ironing-board all day ironing shirt-fronts and goffering frills. In 1832 the frilled shirt-front was not yet altogether exploded. There were elderly gentlemen who still wore those decorations. The whole business was distasteful to Jeanneton. She complained of the heat of the stoves, the weight of the irons, the smell of the starch ; and she came home of an evening white as the shirts she had ironed, and dissolved into tears at the least word of reproach. Her appetite was wretched.

Moved by these complaints, Mère Lemoine herself began to make a trouble of her daughter's avocation, and had more than one violent quarrel with her husband on the subject. Père Lemoine was well started upon the downward course by this time, and spent half his earnings upon cheap brandy. The girl was dying by inches, Mère Lemoine told her husband ; it was a blackamoor's slavery to which he had sold her yonder, and they were not a penny the richer for her sufferings.

'Perhaps you would rather she were in the streets,' growled Lemoine, who thought clear-starching a genteel trade, and that he had done very well for his daughter when he got her accepted as pupil of Madame Rebèque, at the sign of the 'Garden of Eden,' without a sous of premium. When she had worked for Madame a year gratis, she was to receive twelve francs a week, which was to be increased six months afterwards to eighteen. At the outfitters in the Faubourg du Temple his sister had

never earned more than two francs a day, toiling early and late ; and the stooping over her work all day had given her a chest complaint, which carried her to Père Lachaise before she was thirty.

Lemoine would hear of no complainings. He was not a duke, or a millionaire, he protested savagely, but an honest mechanic, and his daughter must work as he worked ; which comparison, seeing that Père Lemoine seldom laboured more than three days out of the seven, hardly bore upon the case of a girl who had to go to her work every morning except Sunday at six o'clock, and was seldom free to come home till seven.

The tears and sullen looks went on for about six months. Then came a change : smiles, alacrity, a more careful toilet, the poor little cotton gown and grisette's muslin cap adjusted as jauntily as if they had been the satin and leghorn of a countess. The mother and father heard the girl singing as she went to her work in the cold early morning, long before they thought of leaving their dingy pallets.

'She has got the better of all that nonsense, and is growing fond of her trade,' said Père Lemoine. 'See how wise we were not to listen to her rigmaroles ! That is the only way to manage a girl of her age. They are as full of fancies as the great ham fair is full of mountebanks and pickpockets.'

After this period of joyousness and alacrity there came another change. Jeanneton was gay and sad by turns—to-day in tears, to-morrow full of wild spirits, laughing, chattering at the humble supper table, cheeks flushed, eyes flashing. At such times she looked her handsomest, and Mère Lemoine sighed to think so much beauty was being wasted in a clear starcher's workshop.

Neither father nor mother was thoughtful enough or careful enough to read all these signs and tokens, which would have had a very clear significance for wise and loving parents. Neither of them ever thought of following Jeanneton to her work, or asking any questions of Madame Rebèque. There had been no complaints ; therefore, it might be supposed the girl did her duty. She left home at the same hour every morning ; and if she had taken to being much later at night, it was because there was overtime work to be done, for which she was paid liberally, in proof of which there were the four or five francs she handed her mother at the end of the week.

One bright spring morning Jeanneton left the Rue Sombreuil at the usual hour, carrying all her wardrobe neatly packed in a large red cotton handkerchief. Neither father nor mother was astir to see her depart, and it was late in the forenoon that Mère Lemoine, by no means a notable housewife, went into the

darksome closet where the girl slept to give a stroke of the broom, and discovered a little bit of a note pinned on to the patchwork counterpane :—

'I am going away with the man of my choice for good fortune or evil. Don't fret about me, poor old mother. I should have died at that odious laundry business if it had not been for my René. I shall come back some day, perhaps, a lady, in a bonnet and an Indian shawl, and then you and the father will be pleased with me. If ever my René is rich, I will send you money. God bless and keep you, poor little mother ! René is a follower of a person called Voltaire, and says there is no God, and that we are all fools to believe in justice and mercy up in the skies, where there are only the stars and millions of miles of empty space. But I like to think there is Someone up there above all those dear little stars. Adieu, and forgive your poor Jeanneton.'

The damsel's parents were as furious as if they had guarded and treasured this one daughter as the apple of their eye. Not Shylock himself stormed and chafed worse at the elopement of Jessica, albeit she carried off good store of ducats to her lover, than Père Lemoine at Jeanneton's evanishment. He rushed off to Madame Rebèque, half stupefied and wholly savage with strong drink, to demand of her what she had done with his daughter.

The laundress treated his angry interrogations with the high hand.

'My faith, what do I know of your daughter? She is no affair of mine. It was for you and her mother to see that she conducted herself wisely. Name of a name ! she has been troublesome enough for the last three months : coming to her work late—always wanting to leave early for some excuse or other.'

'Leave early !' echoed Père Lemoine. 'Why, she has been working till ten o'clock at night, she told us. She brought us the money she was paid for overtime.'

'I pay for overtime ! What a farce !' cried the laundress. 'If she has brought you money, it was for no overtime with me.'

There was no more to be got out of Madame Rebèque, who did not want to say all she knew lest the matter should be made troublesome to herself in any way. One more apprentice gone to the bad made no difference to her. It was the way that half of them went. What would you have ?

Father Lemoine went out of the clear-starcher's shop sobered, quieted, crestfallen. La Rebèque's black eyes and fiery-apple cheeks, grenadier bust and shoulders, bare arms set fiercely akimbo, had been too much for him. He went slowly along the shabby little street, and, halfway down, encountered

a band of noisy students, long-haired, sallow, lank, with Byronic collars and short pipes, issuing out of the Pantagruel, where they had been eating their midday breakfast merrily.

Lemoine turned and followed them as they strolled off towards the Luxembourg. These were the wolves his poor lamb had met every day, and among such as these her seducer was doubtless to be met. 'René'—he was not likely to forget that name. He did not know that it was a name just then made popular by a famous poet, and therefore likely to be chosen as an *alias* by aspiring youth.

The students had to pass Madame Rebèque's window, with its smart muslin curtains and hyacinths in dark blue glasses. A couple of them stopped in front of the window and peered inside.

'Take care that the Rebèque does not see you looking after her chickens,' said a third. 'She is the kind of woman to throw a bowl of dirty water over you if she caught you peeping. You would not be the first to be so baptised.'

'I was looking for that pretty *pâlotte*, that little *gentille Jeanneton*,' said the other.

'Lost time, my friend. The *pâlotte* has no eyes for any of us,' said the other. 'She is devoted to that unknown with the black moustachios, who breakfasts twice a week at the Pantagruel.'

'The Prince René. Ah, I know the gentleman. A regular lion of the Boulevard du Temple.'

They passed on merrily, with much fooling as they went. Père Lemoine turned upon his heel. It seemed to him that these students had told him all they had to tell. They admired his daughter as one of the belles of Madame Rebèque's establishment ; but Jeanneton's lover was not one of them.

He felt in his trousers-pocket, and found a franc and a few sous, quite enough to warrant his entrance into a café restaurant such as the Pantagruel. He went in and took his seat in a dark little corner, where a blouse of dubious cleanliness would not offend the eye of customers of a superior class, notwithstanding which laudable delicacy, the waiter looked askance at Monsieur Lemoine's unshaven chin and greasy blue raiment.

He ordered a bouillon and a fine champagne, otherwise best cognac. The tables were all deserted after the breakfast hour ; and he had the place to himself, which was exactly what he wanted. The waiter brought him his soup and the brandy bottle. He helped himself in a leisurely way, and then filled a second glass.

'Let us chat a little,' he said, pointing to the glass, which the waiter accepted with a gracious bow. The lady of the

counter had gone to some obscure den in the background to eat her own breakfast, and there was no one to object to the waiter's hobnobbing with this very dubious-looking customer. The big sandy cat, a well-known character, was prowling in a forest of table legs, picking up a savory morsel here and there, and rubbing herself against one of the legs as if in a vague expression of gratitude to the universe in general.

'There is a gentleman who breakfasts here sometimes, the Prince René—a gentleman with a dark moustache?'

'Connu,' answered the man, sipping the bright yellow spirit. 'I have the honour to wait upon him.'

'Do you know who and what he is?'

'There are wiser than I who would be glad to know that,' answered the waiter, shrugging his shoulders. 'He is not a student, and he is not a mechanic. He is pretty free with his money, whatever he is. Some take him for an author, or a poet—one of the new romantic school, which was *joliment* hissed the other day at the Théâtre Français; others say he is a nobleman in disguise. There was one who hinted that he is a thief, like Mandrin, or Cartouche.'

'That man spoke the truth, whoever he was!' cried Père Lemoine savagely. 'He is a thief, this villain, for he has stolen my only daughter—as good a girl as ever lived—the staff and comfort of my life;' and here the *ébeniste* broke into a passion of sobs, burying his head in his folded arms upon the table of the Pantagruel.

He went back to his hole in the Rue Sombreuil at nightfall, steeped in fiery liquor, having idled away the afternoon among the lowest *brasseries* in the Quartier Latin; but he made no further effort to discover the true character of the person known as Prince René, or the fate of his only daughter.

## CHAPTER VII

### 'THE CROWN OF OLD MEN'

THREE years and more had gone by since Jeanneton's elopement, and it was August—the season at which Paris is at its worst, and in which sultry period the Rue Sombreuil was a place to be avoided as carefully as the Jews' quarter in Rome or Frankfort. A heavy stagnant atmosphere of heat brooded over the Place de la Bastille and the Faubourg St.-Antoine, and hung like a ragged veil upon the cemetery yonder, and the wild crags and precipices of the stone quarries by the *buttes Chaumont*. The crowded population of the big house which the Lemoines inhabited existed as best they might upon the scanty allowance of fresh air which found its way into their rooms from the deep well on which their windows looked, or came down into the yard below for coolness. The very flowers which here and there decorated a window-sill languished in their earthen pots. The very scarlet-runners drooped upon their strings. Only the foul smells flourished and fattened in this sickly, suffocating August heat. An odour of stale cabbage and sour dish-water was in the very air men breathed. People talked of last year's awful visitation of cholera, and predicted a return of the scourge, gloating ghoul-like over the picture of greater horrors to come, a more terrible cup of affliction to be drunk than the death-chalice of the year gone by. There had been a long drought, which promised well for the cornfields and the vineyards, but which was felt as an actual scourge in the crowded neighbourhoods of Paris—no welcome rain to wash the gutters, to flush the primitive sewers of that period, to cool the hot pavements, and splash with refreshing sound upon the stony roads. All was fiery and dry, as if Paris had been one huge furnace.

Father Lemoine carried his cabinet work into the yard, and worked just outside his den, using the window-sill as a shelf for his tools. The children came and stood about him as he worked, and made their remarks upon the mysteries of his craft—his glue-pot, his chisels, his gouges, and fine little nails. But the work stood still a good many hours of every day, sometimes for days together, with a piece of old sacking over it, while Père Lemoine amused himself at 'The Faithful Pig,' reading the news, playing dominoes, talking politics, grumbling against the new king and his ministers. Paris had naturally expected the

millennium after the glorious days of July; and the reign of the elected monarch had as yet fallen some way short of the Parisian idea of a millennium. The old faubourg of St.-Antoine, populous as an ant-hill, was the seething hot-bed of revolutionary feeling; and men who drank in those historic wine-shops were more drunken with strong words than with strong wine. Lemoine, the *trolleur*, was an ardent politician in these days, a member of the society of the Rights of Man, and full of undisciplined eloquence about his own right to work as little and to drink as much as he liked.

Mère Lemoine was not always at home in this sultry weather. Her husband's earnings had been a diminishing quantity during the last year or so, not because he worked worse or was worse paid for his work, but because he worked less than of yore. Drunken habits were beginning to exercise their usual effect. He was idle and irregular in his life, worked with fury for a couple of days, and then left off for three, or worked like a demon for a morning, and spent the whole afternoon out of doors. Mère Lemoine found that she must do something for her own part to swell the family budget, or else go very often without *fricot*, or a morsel of meat in the *pot-au-feu*. She had been educated in all the arts of fine laundry work, and to that kind of work she naturally returned. She went to Madame Rebèque, and engaged herself to that person as ironer for four days a week; the other two days would be quite sufficient to devote to the *menage* in the Rue Sombreuil, which already left much to be desired in the way of purity, and fell far short of a Dutch interior in neatness and polish.

At Madame Rebèque's the bereft mother heard various details of her daughter's lapse from good ways. How *la pâlotte*, as she was called in the laundry, had first been seen walking with a tall man in a frock-coat in the gardens of the Luxembourg; how she had been observed to wear a blue bead necklace and a pair of real gold earrings; and how she had been seen at a later period driving with the same man—a handsome man with a thick black moustache—in a *forty sous* (hired carriage); how she was known to have gone to dances at the Pré Catalan; how she had told Herminie, that stout girl in the blue cotton frock, that her lover was a nobleman's son, and that she had no cause to be ashamed of him. His family lived at a château near Nîmes, and he was to take her to live there with them. She was to live like a lady, learn to play the piano, and she was to wear silk gowns with *gigot* sleeves. All this Mère Lemoine heard from the workwomen. Madame Rebèque still pretended to have had no hint of her apprentice's danger.

'Who knows if the poor child was not telling the truth all the time? She may be living as a lady in a grand château, and her husband may have made her promise to hold no communication with her parents,' said Mère Lemoine, who would fain have induced the laundry to look at the sunny side of the picture.

The laundresses laughed aloud over their ironing-board.

'They all tell the same story, these fine gentlemen,' said one—'a stern father, a grand château, the family name, impossible to make a marriage of inclination until the father dies, and then she will be mistress of the château and *tout le tremblement*. And most likely your fine gentleman is only a clerk at ninety francs a month, or a student in law or medicine, with a father keeping a shop somewhere in the provinces. It is only fools who believe such stories; but the *pâlotte* was a born innocent—always moping by herself, or crying in corners, never taking kindly to her work or to our company. Such a girl is an easy prey for a scoundrel.'

No one was able to tell Mère Lemoine anything more about the Prince René than that he was tall and good-looking, with a black moustache and a military walk. He had not been seen in the quarter since Jeanneton's elopement.

And now it was more than three years since the girl's flight, and not a line had come from her to tell whether she was still among the living.

'She is dead, I hope,' said Jacques Lemoine, brutally; but the mother still kept a tender corner in her heart for the girl, to whom she had not been over-kind when they two were together.

It was the end of August, and the evening air was heavy with an impending thunderstorm. There had been many thunderstorms during that month of sultry weather, and the leaden-hued skies seemed charged with electricity. To-night, as Mère Lemoine walked home from her laundry, there was that terrible stillness which comes before the warring of the heavens. Lights were burning dimly in some of the windows of the Sombreuil barrack; but the general impression of the courtyard as Mère Lemoine went in through the archway was one of cavernous darkness.

Her own room was darker still, and she had to grope upon the chimney-piece for matches and a tinder-box. While she was fumbling about among dirty brass candlesticks and saucepan lids, something stirred upon the hearth and startled her violently—something which she touched with her foot presently, while her trembling hands struck a light. What was it—a dog, or something human?

It was very human. A white face looked up at her, passive, ghastly in the blue light of the sulphur match.

'Mother!' came like a cry of pain from pale, quivering lips.

'Mon Dieu!' cried the mother, falling on her knees beside that crouching figure, while the match fell and expired upon the cold hearth by which the wanderer squatted. 'My child Jeanneton, and alive!'

'Not very long to live, mother, or I should not be here to-night,' the hollow voice answered.

It was not Jeanneton's old voice. Something told Mère Lemoine that it was the voice of one whose life was fading, just as the match had flickered out upon the hearth a moment before.

'No, no, *fillette*; don't say that. Suppose there has been trouble—let that pass. Our hearts are not stone; we know how to forgive. Wait while I strike another match. You are tired and faint. There is a drop of wine in the cupboard, I dare say, and that will revive you.'

The tinder-box flashed again; another match was struck, and the candle lighted. The mother set it on the table, and then turned to look at her daughter, who still crouched on the hearth, with her head and shoulders resting against the side of the chimney-piece.

Alas! what a change was there! *La pâlotte*, as they had called her at the laundry, had been once of a lily-like fairness. She had now a yellow tint, as of a face moulded out of wax. Her cheeks were hollow, her lips had a purple tinge; her eyes had that awful lustre which tells of lung disease; her shrunken hands were almost transparent, and the shoulders—the poor bent shoulders—and hollow chest indicated the extremity of weakness.

'*Pauverette*,' sobbed the mother, lifting this vanishing creature in her arms, on her lap, as when she was a child of ten or eleven. Alas! as light a burden now as in those earlier days. 'My pet, what has befallen you?'

'Only misery, mother; the fate that befalls every woman who puts her trust in an idler. No, I will not speak evil of him. It was Destiny more than he that was unkind. If the world were more just, men more merciful to each other, my life would have been different.'

'Tell me everything, *chérie*; fear not your poor old mother. The father will be home presently, and we will tell him any story you will; but have no secrets from me.'

'I will not, mother,' she answered faintly. 'Oh, how good you are! I thought you would thrust me out of doors—spurn me with your foot when you found me on your hearth. I will tell you by-and-by—everything—but not yet.'

The dry lips faltered as if the speaker was going to faint; then Mère Lemoine placed the girl in an old arm-chair—a Voltaire—which the *ébéniste* occupied in his hours of leisure. She rushed to the cupboard and brought out a bottle with a remnant of wine left from last night's supper—another bottle in a secret corner on the shelf above held a few spoonfuls of brandy. She mixed the two in a tumbler, and gave it to her daughter, who drank greedily.

'My mouth was parched,' she murmured, putting down the glass with her tremulous hand, while her mother brought out some fragments of *charcuterie*—the remains of an *assiette assortie* purchased for the morning's breakfast—odd pieces of pork and sausage. Mère Lemoine put these on the table with knife and fork, and plate, and a loaf of bread.

'I have walked a long way since daybreak,' faltered Jeanneton 'The roads were hot and dusty—my feet burnt like fire. It was like walking on red-hot iron.'

'Where have you come from?'

'Toulon,' answered the girl.

'Toulon! What took you to Toulon?'

'Fate! Don't ask me anything to-night, mother. Let me have one night's rest under a roof—in a bed. I have not slept in one for nearly a month.'

'My poor child! And the château near Nimes, and the rich father?'

'What! you heard of that?'

'Yes, I am at work with La Rebèque. Your father does not earn so much as of old; one must help a little.'

'Poor mother! Yes, the château, the noble father, the silk gowns, and carriages, and piano: the life that I was to lead far away. All lies, mother; lies which only a baby or an idiot would believe. But that is past and gone. Mother, I have come to bring you trouble.'

'Never mind the trouble. Eat something, my pet; try to eat.'

Jeanneton made an attempt, but those savoury morsels of pork had no flavour for her dry lips. The wine had comforted her—she drained the glass—but she had no appetite—her throat seemed thick and swollen—she could with difficulty swallow two or three mouthfuls of bread.

'I am not hungry, mother; I think I have got out of the way of eating. Come, let me show you something.'

She rose with an agitated air, took up the candle, and led the way to that narrow closet of a chamber in which she had slept as a girl—the room where she left the letter pinned on her coverlet on the morning of her flight.

Jeanneton leant over the bed and held the candle, shading the light with her too transparent hand. A child of two years old, with a shock of curly flaxen hair, was sleeping placidly on the tattered patchwork counterpane, wrapped in a ragged shawl.

'Yours?' said the mother, and not another word.

'Mine,' answered the daughter. 'Will you take care of her, and bring her up as your own when I am gone?'

'Oh, but you are not going to die,' remonstrated Mère Lemoine, kneeling down to caress the child. 'With a bed to sleep in and good food, you will soon get strong again and recover your pretty looks. And—who knows?—you may find a kind husband yet who will provide a good home for you and this *gamine* here.'

'Don't talk nonsense, mother. You know and I know that I am dying. I have known as much for the last three months. It has been a slow death; but the end is coming. Promise me not to send this little one to the Enfants Trouvés. I could not rest in my grave if I thought she was to be sent there.'

'Never, my Jeanneton: I swear it.'

'God bless you, mother, for that promise.'

'Perhaps her father may come to claim her some day,' suggested Mère Lemoine, dying with curiosity about her daughter's past now that she was recovering from the shock of the meeting.

'Never. He has other business in life than to claim his child. She must be your own, mother—yours only. And you will take care of her—watch her better than you watched me—you will be wise by experience,' said Jeanneton with a hysterical sob.

She seemed half-sinking with fatigue; she had walked fifteen miles under the burning August sky on the sun-baked roads, carrying her child the greater part of the way, obliged to stop to rest every half-hour or so by the roadside, in shade or sunlight. Her mother undressed her, taking off the dusty raiment, which was tidier than might have been expected under the circumstances, and supplying a ragged old petticoat and camisole of her own for night-gear. And then Jeanneton sank wearily down upon the bed beside her baby girl, the bed upon which she had slept lightly enough in days gone by.

'Oh, how sweet it is to be in a bed!' she murmured; 'and yet all my bones ache.'

She was asleep in a few minutes, the child's head nestling against her bony shoulder, her wasted arm; but her breathing was laboured, and she started every now and then in her sleep with a murmur of pain.

Happily this was one of Père Lemoine's late nights. It was twelve o'clock when he came in from 'The Faithful Pig,' and he was too far gone to be told of Jeanneton's return. That must wait till next morning.

When morning came poor Jeanneton was in no condition to plead her own cause with an offended father upon earth. Only the heavenly Father of us all could understand the language which those dry lips babbled to-day in the delirium of high fever. The glassy eyes gazed upon Mère Lemoine and knew her not: they seemed to see things and people far away.

The *trolleur*, in a sombre mood after last night's revelry, inclined to see life under the blackest hue, was grimly pitiful of his daughter's dying state, and did not urge that she should be flung out of doors. But he spoke of her, even in her sickness, with undisguised bitterness. This is what such creatures bring upon themselves when they forsake a good home and a loving father and mother to follow a villain. He was furious at the idea that his wife had sworn to rear the child—not to send her to the Enfants Trouvés, the only natural home for such *canaille*.

'To the hospital she shall go,' he said, 'before we are many hours older. *Cré nom!* is it not enough to have reared one viper? Would you let another of the same brood warm itself in our bosoms to sting us by-and-by, when we are old and feeble?—and this one has a villain's blood in her veins. From Toulon she came, you say, that trash yonder? No doubt she has left her René there in the prison. That would be his natural end. To the hospital with that base-born brat? I shall take her there myself after dark.'

His wife began to cry. What was she that such shame and misery should befall her? she demanded. An honest working woman, able to earn her *pâtée* as well as ever her husband earned his. *She* worked four days in the week, while he worked scarcely three, and half his earnings were spent at 'The Faithful Pig.' Suppose she chose to bring up her dying daughter's child? She had a right to spend the few pence the child's maintenance would cost out of her wages at the laundry. And by-and-by, when she was old, the granddaughter would be a help to her. She defied her husband, and bade him take the little one to the Foundling Hospital at his peril. If he did, she would make the faubourg ring with the story of his cruelty. She stormed with such vehemence that Jacques Lemoine was fain to sneak out of the house and repair to a little restaurant in the Rue de la Roquette, famous for its *pieds de mouton roulette* at seven sous, and its Bordeaux at twelve sous the litre.

When he was gone Mère Lemoine borrowed a pinch of *tilleul* from a neighbour and brewed a *tisane* for her sick daughter, which powerful remedy had, strange to say, no effect on the galloping pulse or dry, hard skin. The grandmother washed and dressed the child, and let her toddle about the living-room, and even into the yard. She was a pretty little thing, as like what the mother was in her girlhood as the bud is like the flower, yet with a more exquisite delicacy of feature—pale, and with large blue eyes. She had a sorrowful look, as if the dreamy, half-unconscious first years of life had brought her few childish joys; yet betimes the little face broke into smiles, and the wide blue eyes laughed merrily, as children's eyes do laugh, at the wonderland of childish fancies and dreams. She could talk a little after her baby fashion, and toddle about the yard, pointing to rays of sunlight flickering on the wall, and crying, 'Pretty, pretty,' enraptured with a kitten which graciously suffered the caress of her soft little arms.

In the afternoon, the *tisane* having proved ineffectual, Mère Lemoine called one of her gossips in to look at her daughter. The gossip opined that the poor young woman was in a desperate way, and recommended Madame Lemoine to fetch an apothecary whom she knew of in a street hard by. The apothecary was out when Mère Lemoine went in search of him, and it was not until nightfall that he came to look at Jeanneton. He knelt down beside the pallet, felt the sufferer's pulse, looked at the large dim eyes, so bright yesterday, so dull to-day.

'I can do nothing,' he said. 'She is sinking fast. You had better go for a priest at once. You should have called me sooner.'

Mère Lemoine, in self-justification, told the circumstances of her daughter's home-coming.

'Poor thing! To walk fifteen miles in her state was simple suicide. It could only be wonderful energy of mind which enabled her to accomplish it. Her case must have been hopeless a month ago—galloping consumption.

Père Lemoine had been so disturbed by his wife's vehemence, that work was naturally impossible, and it was the usual midnight hour when he came home, not drunk, but *allumé*, as he and his friends called it.

He roared out an angry greeting as he crossed the threshold and saw his wife sitting up for him with the baby-girl asleep on her knees; but Mère Lemoine pointed to the door of the little bed-chamber where her daughter lay.

'Did you not see the taper burning in the window as you came across the yard?' she said. 'Could you not guess?'

'Dead?' he faltered hoarsely.

'Dead! She was sensible just at the last, after the priest had been praying over her, and she asked for you. 'Kiss him for me,' she said with her last gasping breath, 'and tell him to forgive.'

The father opened the door softly, and looked in at that poor lay, marble white in the faint light of the consecrated taper. There was some holy water in a saucer on the rush chair beside the bed, and a little spray of box. Lemoine knelt beside the corpse, dipped the spray in the holy water, and made the sign of the cross on that ice-cold brow. It was years since he had made that holy sign—not since his mother's death. A husky sob broke from his labouring chest, his heart beating heavily with the sense of a new pain—remorse—the sense of eternal bereavement.

'He went back to the living-room, and sat down opposite his wife without a word. She leant across and took his hand with a tenderness which was a thing of the past between them, and laid that horny hand upon the child's satin-soft brow.

'Swear that you will not send this nameless orphan to the hospital!' she said. 'Swear!'

'I swear it,' he answered, bending down to kiss the baby-face. He had not had courage to kiss that marble brow yonder, though he had longed to do it.

And so a young life began to grow, and bud, and bloom in that dingy dwelling-place amid foul odours which grew fouler with the passing years, within the sound of loud tongues which changed one slang for another, and one form of blasphemy for another, as time went by, but which never ceased to offend earth and heaven. The child's life was not one of sunshine in that shady place. For the first years—while the memory of the mother's early death was still fresh, a softening influence upon the minds of Père and Mère Lemoine, while the fairy-like loveliness and beguiling ways of childhood made the granddaughter a kind of plaything—the little one was treated with indulgence, was kissed and fondled, fed on the best morsel out of the dish, allowed to occupy the warmest corner of the hearth, and had the softest pillow for her golden head. The child was completely happy in those days, knew not that there was any fairer place on earth than the Rue Sombreuil, loved the murky old house—passing old after forty years' occupation, the cosy hearth, the narrow little room in which her mother had died, the neighbour's children, her playmates. She was a bright, joyous little creature in her childhood, but always slim and delicate in form, and of a snowdrop fairness. She had been baptised Jeannette, but her grandfather called her Pâquerette,

his Easter daisy, on account of her pale cheeks, blanched in that stony well where her life was spent. She came very soon to be called Pâquerette by every one. As she grew to girlhood it was the only name she knew.

When she was seven years old, she was sensible enough to be trusted upon an errand, handy enough to dust the room and sweep the hearth. By the time she was nine, she had learned to be very useful; and then a change came o'er the spirit of her dream, and the pains and penalties of life among the poor began in real earnest for this little pale child call Pâquerette. Once accustomed to make her useful, the grandparents very soon began to treat her as a drudge, and to lose their temper with her at the slightest provocation. Any little mistake in an errand, any neglect of an order from her elders, brought upon her the harshest treatment; nay, errors that were none of hers brought punishment upon her guiltless head. If the grocer gave her a quarter of a pound of bad coffee, or the woman at the *crémerie* supplied a pat of rank butter, it was Pâquerette who suffered. She should not be such an imbecile as to take whatever those thieves chose to foist upon her. She had a nose, had she not, to smell butter so rancid that one could have detected it a street off? Was she to be a fool all her life?—for example.

Sorrows there were many in that orphan girlhood; joys there were none. Aged by anxieties, Pâquerette, at eleven, cared no longer for the play of the common troup of children who made one band in the big house. It was no longer a delight to her to play hide-and-seek on the winding-stone stair and in the long narrow passages with noisy boys and girls—to race about the yard dragging an old stew-pan or a wooden shoe for a cart, or to play at being the *postillon de Longjumeau*, with four small boys for her team. She had taken upon herself all the cares of life at twelve years of age, and had bidden farewell to childhood and its fancies, its sweet imaginary joys, its cheap blisses, in which a dirty, common stair can do duty for a mountain-pass, the embrasure of a door for a feudal castle, a saucepan-lid for the shield of Bayard or Achilles, an old broken chair for a royal carriage, and a broomstick for a prancing thorough-bred.

Nothing moved Pâquerette now except music, and for that she had ever a greedy ear. Let a brown-faced Savoyard stray into the yard and grind a waltz upon his Barbary organ, and Pâquerette would throw aside her broom, or leave her tub of dish-water, and go waltzing round the dirty courtyard on the points of her slim young feet—light as any fawn in the glades of St. Germain or Fontainebleau. But even such a joy as this was of the rarest. Paris was not rich in barrel-organs in those

days, and the grinders knew that the Rue Sombreuil was not likely to give them a plenteous harvest.

It never occurred to Père or Mère Lemoine that the sordid, monotonous existence which was good enough for them was hardly suitable for the dawn of life; that this pale flower which they had sworn to rear was languishing and fading in their charge. In sober truth, Pâquerette would have been far better off at the hospital for nameless children than she was in that ground-floor den in the Rue Sombreuil. State charity would have lodged her better, clad her better, taught her better, provided her with more recreation, and in every way been a better parent to her than these of her own flesh and blood, who let her wallow in ignorance, shutting her off alike from all knowledge of the glorious beauty of earth and from all hope in the infinite joys of heaven.

And thus, a drudge and a scapegoat for two elderly people with whom the world did not go over well, and who grew a little less amiable with the passing of the years, Pâquerette endured the monotony of a joyless existence till she was seventeen. Very child in ignorance of all good, very woman in knowledge of evil.

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## CHAPTER VIII

### 'SHE STRETCHETH OUT HER HAND TO THE POOR'

It was Sunday, and all the world of the Faubourg St.-Antoine was drifting towards that wider world outside the walls of Paris where there were fields and gardens, parks and woods, and where the river seemed to take a new colour as it flowed between verdant banks under the shadow of spreading willows. Everybody was holiday-making except that one little family in the murky ground-floor looking into the pent-up yard—everybody else in the world was happy, and idle, and gay, as it seemed to Pâquerette; but for her Sunday made no difference. Neither the *trolleur* nor his wife ever went to church, or put on Sunday clothes, or went holiday-making in the afternoon, like their neighbours. They had no Sunday clothes, nor had Pâquerette. The *trolleur's* only notion of a holiday was to go earlier than usual to 'The Faithful Pig,' and to stay later, and drink more. His wife sat at home, and hugged her misery, and drank secretly. So that when Père Lemoine came home from his noisy revelries,

steeped in vitriol, but as firm on his legs as a granite pillar, he found the wife in a silent and stony condition, which might mean a dignified sullenness, and which the *trolleur* never troubled himself to interrogate. It was enough for him that there were no wearisome remonstrances—that no vessels of hot or cold water were ever flung at his head, as was the fashion in some domiciles he knew of under that very roof; that he was allowed to roll into his wretched straw bed and court slumber in peace. If any one had questioned him about his wife, he would have replied that she was one of the soberest of women—only a little given to sulks when he stayed out after midnight.

Pâquerette knew better, or knew worse, about her grandmother. She had been sent too often to replenish Mère Lemoine's brandy-bottle at a little wine-shop in the close and fœtid alley round the corner—the wretched lane where the waste from the dyer's workshop made pools of crimson water that lay like blood-stains in the muddy hollows beside a gutter half-choked with refuse, cabbage-leaves, egg-shells, and an occasional dead cat. In this unholy place, at a dark little den down a couple of steps, Pâquerette was a familiar visitor. The *patron* filled her bottle without waiting for her to ask for what she wanted. Sometimes she had the money ready to hand him, sometimes she had to ask for indulgence till the next time, and the *patron* was fierce and expressed himself harshly. Once she had trembled at that wolfish ferocity of his—the deep, harsh voice and strong language; but custom hardened her, and she came to understand that those terrible oaths, that bass thunder, only meant that she must not go there too often without the money in her hand.

It was Sunday, a brilliant morning in the middle of May, and Pâquerette sat on a broken-down wooden stool in the yard, just beside the door of that room which was workshop, kitchen, and living-room all in one for the *trolleur's* family. It was between ten and eleven o'clock. The bells of Notre Dame were ringing, and Père Lemoine and his wife were still asleep in the den at the back of the sitting-room. They always slept later on Sunday mornings. That was the one difference by which they honoured the Sabbath. Pâquerette had been to fetch a loaf from the shop on the other side of the street, and had brought from the cupboard the remains of an *arlequin* bought overnight in the market-place, a curious assortment of broken victuals, the refuse of the fashionable restaurants, piled together artistically, a lottery of comestibles in which a lucky venturer might gain half a truffled pheasant, or the tail of a fine lobster—a hodge-podge of good things, where fish and flesh, confectionery and vegetables jostled each other. Pâquerette looked

longingly at the wall of a *vol-au-vent* half full of chocolate cream as she set out the table for her elders, but she did not presume to begin her breakfast without them. She had made the coffee, which was simmering in a *chauffrette*, and now she was sitting listlessly in the yard, looking up at the blue bright sky as out of a well, hardly hoping to see more of its beauty than she could see thus, sitting at her door, pent in by walls which were as the walls of a prison. Had not her whole life been spent in a prison hemmed round and shut in by poverty, ignorance, neglect, cruelty, helplessness? The girls in prisons and reformatories are better cared for than ever Pâquerette had been.

She sat gazing up at the sky. Sometimes her eyes fell lower, and she looked at the many windows staring down at her from the four sides of that stone well like so many eyes. Each window was alive, as it were, and had its peculiar significance. The tall, dilapidated old house teemed with human life. At some windows clothes were hanging out to dry; at some—these only the few among the many—there were flowers. Here and there hung a bird-cage. Those windows were the cleanest which had birds or flowers, and Pâquerette fancied life must be sweeter and more peaceful in the room that was shaded with yonder box of wallflowers, dark-green leaves, and blossoms of gold and crimson. Some windows were screened by a bright-coloured curtain, across another hung a limp and dirty rag, which hinted at a filthy interior. Children were hanging out of some windows, women were looking out of others. Before one a man was shaving himself in an airy costume of shirt and braces. At another a girl was peeling potatoes. Fragments of song, fragments of speech, fell into the silence of the yard below; and from an open window high up came a gush of melody, the serenade from 'Don Pasquale,' whistled divinely by a young house-painter who lived under the tiles. Pâquerette knew hardly any one to speak to in the thickly-peopled barrack. There were some who were old inhabitants like the Lemoines, who had squatted down in their one or two rooms among their poor scraps of second-hand furniture, or their heirlooms brought from some far-away country village a quarter of a century ago, and had been content to grow old with the house, which was rotting visibly, no one spending any money upon its repair. Others came and went, and were like the shifting figures in a kaleidoscope, alike and yet not the same. Pâquerette was too shy to make friends. There were merry girls in some of the rooms—girls who worked hard all day, yet were full of talk and laughter when they came home in the evening. Two, three, sometimes four, lived together in a small apartment—sisters, cousins, friends.

There were a pair of sisters who lived behind that window with the wallflowers, and who shared their room with a cousin older than themselves. This little *ménage* Pâquerette had observed with peculiar interest. The three girls seemed so happy. They had such an air of perfect contentment in their work and their lives, their simple pleasures and humble home. She saw them go out in the morning when she was doing her housework, before grandmother or grandfather had emerged from the inner den yonder. She saw them go to mass in the early morning, she saw them run in again for a hurried breakfast, and then off to work. The two sisters worked for a third-rate dressmaker in the Marais; the cousin worked in a bedding warehouse in the Rue Ste. Honoré, and spent all her days in stabbing mattresses with a big needle. They were always neatly clad. On Sundays they looked like young ladies, and, if the weather were fine, they always went out in the afternoon with their friends, coming home after dark under masculine escort, but in a sober, respectable fashion that gave no ground for scandal.

On some rare occasions, gratefully remembered by Pâquerette, these girls had stopped to speak to her as they passed by. Pauline, the youngest and merriest, had asked her why the old people never took her out, at Christmas time and the new year, for instance, when the Boulevards were well worth going to see. One need not have any money to spend. Only to look at the stalls of toys and jewellery, and the lights and the people, was an evening's pleasure. Pâquerette shook her head sadly. The grandfather and grandmother would not walk so far. They had seen all that, and it was worth nothing; the same thing year after year, they said.

'Ah, but you have never seen it,' cried Pauline. 'Can old people forget that they have ever been young? Besides, it is not the same every year. There are always new toys, new trinkets, new bonbons, new words, new jokes. No new year is quite the same as last year. And if it were, there is time to forget between whiles. Lights and music and happy faces are always fresh. You shall go with us next Christmas.'

Pâquerette gave a sigh of rapture.

'Oh, I should so like!' she said; 'but you would be ashamed of me in my old clothes.'

'But your clothes cannot always be old,' answered Pauline with her bright laugh. 'You can save your next new gown for Christmas.'

Pâquerette crimsoned, and hung her head, but said never a word. The truth was, that she had never had a new gown in her life. Mère Lemoine had amicable relations with a snuffy old woman in the Temple, who dealt in second-hand clothes,

and it was from the very refuse, the offal of this old hag's stock-in-trade, that Pâquerette's wardrobe was occasionally replenished. The two old women drank their litre of little-blue or their measure of three-six together, and over their cups debated the price of those few rags which Madame Druge, the dealer, flung together in a dirty heap upon the floor. Pâquerette wore anything—a wine-stained velvet jacket, the nap crushed and the edges frayed, a garment that had grown old before its time, like its first owner, now riding in a carriage, anon rolling in the gutter, the cast-off livery of vice—or a cotton skirt that had grown thin in the wear-and-tear of honest labour. Pâquerette had neither voice nor choice in the matter.

'Why do you never mend your clothes, child?' asked the eldest of the three girls one day, a tall, stout young woman, who was called big Lisbeth—a broad-shouldered, strong-minded, outspoken damsel of eight-and-twenty, the soul of honesty and good-nature. She gave Pâquerette a little friendly tap upon the cheek. 'My child, why are you always in rags?' she asked reproachfully; and then Pâquerette owned with tears that she had no needles and thread, and that she had never been taught to sew. This state of things was too horrible. Big Lisbeth took the girl straight to her apartment, the room with the wall-flowers in the window, a room with two beds in alcoves, shaded by white muslin curtains, everything neat and clean as the palm of your hand. Pâquerette looked about her, dazzled by the prettiness of the room. It was the first decent or orderly room she had ever entered. She could not imagine that a duchess would have anything better. The mahogany chest of drawers shining with polish, the white jug and basin, the bunch of flowers in a glass vase on the mantelpiece, the portraits of Louis-Philippe and Marie Amélie neatly nailed against the whitewashed wall, and between them a coloured print of the Holy Family, with a white and gilt china *bénitier* just below it. On a shelf by the fireplace there were white cups and saucers—ah, how clean!—and an old copper coffee-pot, which shone like a jewel. As compared with that wretched kennel on the ground-floor, this room was as the Heavenly Jerusalem, with its jasper walls and gates of pearl, compared with the foulest city on earth.

Lisbeth took out her needle-case and gave Pâquerette her first lesson in sewing. The girl was very awkward. Her fingers were unacquainted with the use of a needle, and the cotton skirt was like tinder—the stuff broke away from the needle. But Lisbeth was very patient, and the long slit which had attracted her attention in the yard below got cobbled together somehow, while Pâquerette acquired some rudimentary ideas as to the use of a needle and thread. Lisbeth made her

a present of half a dozen needles, an old brass thimble, and a reel of cotton—the first gift of any kind which the girl had ever received from any one outside her own family. She promised that she would use the needles, and mend her clothes always in future. The thimble was a difficulty. She doubted if she should ever accustom herself to the use of that curious instrument, but she promised to try.

'Why do you wear a velvet jacket and a cotton skirt? asked Lisbeth, bluntly. 'That does not go well together. Besides, velvet for working-people! It is scarcely respectable?'

Pâquerette hung her head. It was a small, pretty-shaped head, like a rosebud on its stalk, and had a trick of drooping when Pâquerette was troubled or confused.

'Grandmother buys them,' she faltered.

'Grandmother is an old fool,' exclaimed Lisbeth, angrily.

She was indignant with that old *trolleur* and his wife for bringing up their grandchild so vilely. They taught her nothing. She sat in the sun half the day rolling her thumbs and looking up at the sky. She had grown up as a pagan in a Christian city, with the bells of Notre Dame ringing within earshot. She could do nothing useful for herself, or for other people, except cook and clean up a little, in her poor untaught way, for that wretched old man and his wife. She was a regular Cinderella, and there are no good fairies nowadays to come to Cinderella's relief.

Pâquerette had never heard the story of Cinderella, or she might have thought of her to-day as she sat gazing idly up at the sky while all the world was going forth to its pleasure. She had no hope of going any further than the yard, or of seeing any more of the sky than she saw now. Her hands hung listlessly at her sides; her head leant wearily against the dirty stone wall behind her. She was slipshod, slovenly, with her hair rolled up in a loose knot that seemed too big for her head.

She was sitting thus, hopeless, idle, unfriended, when the three young women—the demoiselles Benoît—came back from mass. This picture of forlorn girlhood struck them all three at once.

'That poor child! Just look at her! I should like to massacre those wicked old people,' muttered Lisbeth, who always used strong language.

'She looks the picture of misery,' said Toinette, with a compassionate sigh.

'If we could only do anything to cheer her a little,' murmured Pauline.

After all, the race of good fairies is not quite extinct. They are human, the good fairies of the present, and their power is limited. They cannot turn a melon into a Lord Mayor's coach

or a lizard into a prize footman ; but there is much that can be done, if people will only do it, with the wand called charity. The good Samaritan who went out of his way and took some trouble to help his fellow-creature is a grander ideal than Cinderella's fairy, who had the command of all Wonderland, and never took any trouble at all.

'What a fine day, Pâquerette ! Are not your old people going to take you out this afternoon ?'

The girl shook her head.

'They never go into the country, and grandmother never goes out till after dark,' she said piteously.

'What foolish people ! We are all going to Vincennes for a picnic. Have you ever been there ?'

'I have never been anywhere,' said Pâquerette, with a reproachful air.

There was a kind of cruelty in asking her such a question. Surely they must know that she was never taken out for her pleasure.

'And you have never been to a picnic ?' asked Pauline.

Pâquerette answered dumbly, only by a shake of her head. The tears came into her eyes. Why did they tease her by such silly questions ? Why could they not take their pleasure and let her alone ?

The three girls lingered in the yard a few paces from Pâquerette, putting their heads together and whispering.

'We could lend her a gown and a cap,' said Pauline.

'It would not cost much to take her. Ten sous for the omnibus there and back. There is enough in the basket for all.'

'If Madame Morice would not mind,' speculated Toinette.

'Why should Madame Morice mind ? The girl is well-behaved : she will interfere with nobody.'

A little more whispering, and then Pauline, the youngest of these three lowly graces—she who had been the first to speak to Pâquerette—went over to the lonely child and said :

'Would you like to go to Vincennes with us this afternoon ? We'll take you, if your people will let you go. I can lend you a gown. We are pretty much of a size, I think.'

Pâquerette started up from her rickety little stool crimson with wonder.

'You don't mean it !' she cried, clasping her hands. 'Oh, you couldn't be so kind !'

'Nonsense, child, it is no great matter,' answered Lisbeth, in her frank, loud voice. 'We shall be very glad to have you with us, poor little thing. Run and speak to your old people ; there is no time to be lost, and then come up to our room. You know the way.'

'Oh, yes, Mademoiselle. I have not forgotten your goodness in teaching me to sew.'

The three girls went indoors while Pâquerette ran into the den where her grandfather was taking his coffee at the table near the fireplace in his morning dress of shirt, trousers, and slippers. He looked as if he had not washed or combed his hair for a week ; but he was only saving himself up for a swimming-bath by the Pont Neuf, an indulgence which he generally gave himself on a Sunday afternoon. He was not quite so bad as he seemed.

He lolled at ease in the dilapidated old Voltaire, his naked feet half out of his tattered old slippers, and reposing on a chair opposite. He sipped his coffee and gazed dreamily at his work —a *bonheur-du-jour* in amboyna wood, richly inlaid—a work of art. The *charabia* was to come for it to-morrow morning, and take it about to the dealers till he got Père Lemoine his price, out of which Monsieur Charabia naturally took a handsome commission. There were about half a dozen hours' work still wanted for those finishing touches which would make the little bureau perfect, and that labour would most likely be put off till the very last. Père Lemoine would dawdle away his Sabbath in luxurious idleness, and stroll homeward after midnight, *très bon-zig*, to snatch two or three hours' feverish sleep, and then up and to work at earliest dawn, by the light of a tallow candle, so as to be ready for the Auvergnat.

The coffee was good, the *arlequin* suggested a *déjeûner* at the Rocher de Cancale, and the grandfather was amiably disposed to poor little Cinderella.

'Come and have your breakfast, child,' he said. 'I began to think you had taken the key of the fields.'

'I shouldn't know where to look for the fields if I had the key,' she answered ; and then she came round to the back of the old man's chair and leant over him. 'Grandfather, the demoiselles Benoît have asked me to go to Vincennes with them this—afternoon—directly. May I go ?'

The old man shrugged his shoulders and gave a long whistle, expressive of surprise. He knew of the three girls on the fourth floor, and that they were very respectable young persons. He wondered that they should take any notice of such a ragamuffin as his granddaughter.

'Will it cost any money ?' he asked, cautiously ; 'for if it will you can't go. The bag is empty—not a sous till the *charabia* gets me a price for my bureau yonder.'

'They did not say anything about money. They offered to take me to a picnic, that was all ; and Mademoiselle Pauline will lend me one of her gowns.'

'One of her gowns ! What a duchess ! If I had two coats

one of them would be always *au clou* [with the pawnbroker]. Well, you can go, child. If those girls are simple enough to pay for you, I see no objection to your having a day's pleasure. Your pocket will be empty ; so there is no chance of your being swindled by any of your co-operative dodges ; or else the word picnic has a sound I don't like. It meaus handing round a plate after dinner, and for every man to pay his scot.'

'*Bon jour, père*, cried Pâquerette.

She did not give the *trolleur* time to change his mind. She ran across the yard to the steep black staircase upon which the Benoît apartment opened ; a terrible staircase in truth, an air-shaft for all insalubrious odours, a dark well whose greasy walls were thick with the grime of half a century, an atmosphere of infection, rank, sour, musty, tainted with every variety of foulness, animal vegetable, mineral.

Pâquerette was inured to such odours. She took hold of the greasy rope which hung against the slimy wall and served as a banister-rail, and ran lightly up the corkscrew stair, hustled by, or hustling, three or four blouses and one frock-coat who were hurrying down, eager to be off and away for their day's amusement. The door on the fourth landing was open, and the demoiselles Benoit were waiting for her.

'Come, Pâquerette, we want to catch the one o'clock omnibus,' cried big Lisbeth ; and then the door was shut, and the three girls began their *protégée's* toilet.

They meant to do the thing thoroughly, having once taken it in hand. Lisbeth was one of the most thorough-going young women in Paris, a workwoman such as there are few, and everything she did was done well and earnestly. She had trained the two young cousins in the same spirit. In the midst of poverty, surrounded by dirt, slovenliness, drunkenness, and all evil habits, they had kept their lives pure and clean ; and the place they inhabited was an oasis of purity in the murky old house.

All three girls stood for a minute or two looking at Pâquerette as if she had been a work of art. Was she pretty ? They hardly knew ; but they knew that she might be made to look *gentille*. There was an air of elegance in the slim, fragile figure, the swan-like throat, the slight droop of the head, which the Benoît damsels, substantially built, felt rather than understood. But of that order of beauty which was appreciated in the Faubourg St.-Antoine Pâquerette had not a trace. The sparkling eyes, the *beauté du diable*, fresh complexion, girlish plumpness were not here. There was rather a look of sickliness, a waxen pallor, and an attenuation which, from a conventional point of view, was fatal to beauty.

Instructed by her friends, Pâquerette plunged her head and shoulders into a shallow wooden tub, and made such use of soap and water as she had never done before, emerging flushed and breathless from this novel ordeal to scrub herself vigorously with a large huckaback towel, a very coarse, common towel, but, oh! how delightfully clean. The flavour of cleanliness, the fresh odours of abundant soap and water, were new things in Pâquerette's experience.

'Sit down, child, and let me do your hair,' said Lisbeth with bluff authority.

'Oh! Mademoiselle,' murmured the girl, overcome with shame at the thought of her unkempt locks.

Happily, she had a habit of dipping her head in the wretched cracked little basin every morning when she washed her face, for coolness sake, so the rough head was fairly clean. What a mass of soft brown hair fell about the child's shoulders when Lisbeth had drawn out two rusty spikes of hair-pins—a soft, palish brown, not auburn, or golden, or chestnut—a shadowy veil of fine soft hair, which fell round the thin wan face like an evening cloud.

While Lisbeth brushed and combed the long thick mass of hair Pauline and Toinette consulted in a corner as to the gown they would lend the orphan, and finally decided on a white cotton with little pink spots, clean and fresh from the ironing board. Girls who are good starchers and ironers and not afraid of the public laundry can afford to wear clean clothes. The hairdressing was finished by this time, the soft brown tresses were brushed back from the forehead and rolled into a large knot at the back of the small head; and now Pâquerette, casting the slough of her poverty, put on a petticoat of Toinette's, and over it Pauline's pink-spotted cotton.

Pauline had prided herself on her small waist until to-day, but her gown was ever so much too big for Pâquerette. It had to be taken off, and the bodice taken in nearly three inches with a few vigorous stitches on each side of the waist; and then the gown was put on again and finished off with a neat linen collar. A dainty little muslin cap was pinned on the smooth brown hair, and Pâquerette, who had submitted very patiently to be turned and twisted about like a doll in the process of dressing, was to be rewarded by the sight of her transformed image in the little looking-glass. Not until the final touch was given to the picture would the three girls allow so much as a peep at the glass. But now, when the last pin had been adjusted, Pauline brought the glass and held it before Pâquerette's astonished eyes.

What did she see there? What kind of image greeted her

curious gaze? A grisette? A grisette only as for cotton frock and white cap. That shy, slender, fragile, ethereal creature had nothing else of the grisette. The type was patrician. That kind of face marked the vanishing point of an aristocratic line—a race dying out, attenuated, but lovely in its decay.

This was beauty assuredly, but the beauty of a white woodland flower—frail, faint—the brief bloom and glory of a day. The soft, gray eyes—dark, pensive—the small Greek nose, and delicate chin, with that receding slope which means weakness of character, the pallid complexion, just relieved by the blush-rose tint of the lips and the pencilling of the eyebrows—all these made up a kind of beauty, but not a type to strike the vulgar eye. Pâquerette was just good-looking enough to pass in a crowd, as the vulgar say, and just the kind of girl to be passed unmarked and unadmired by the crowd. Yet the demoiselles Benoît felt that there was a charm in that pale face and slender form—a charm which was better than vulgar beauty.

'What do you think of yourself now, Pâquerette?' asked Pauline.

But the girl would not express any opinion on this point. She had only words of gratitude for the three good fairies.

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## CHAPTER IX

### 'AS SNOW IN SUMMER

THE Benoît girls and their *protégée* set out for the omnibus office, talking, laughing, intensely happy. Pâquerette had never ridden in an omnibus till to-day. Cinderella could not have been more delighted with her enchanted coach than this waif of St. Antoine with the heavy red omnibus which jolted and rattled over the stones of the shabby boulevard. There is not much beauty in the road from the Place de la Bastille to Vincennes; but to Pâquerette it was rapture to feel the movement of the carriage, and to see the happy-looking people in their Sunday clothes—the children, the mothers, the working men; the noise and bustle and ferment of a fine warm Sunday, the first Sunday of summer, when all the world was at its best, and when all the ants in the ant-hill of St. Antoine had come out of dark holes and corners to bask in the sun.

As they were jolted along Pauline told Pâquerette what

they were going to do. They were to meet their friends at the Fort—Monsieur and Madame Morice—old friends who had known the departed Monsieur Benoît, and Gustave his brother, Lisbeth's father in years gone by, when they all lived in a little bourg in Normandy, about twenty miles from the fine old city of Rouen. Madame Morice had succeeded to a small inheritance left her by a bachelor uncle, a well-to-do blacksmith ; and with this modest fortune she and her husband had come to Paris and set up a small grocery shop at Ménilmontant. The rents were so high in all the good quarters of Paris, that they had been constrained to establish themselves in a district which left much to be desired. But these Morices were exceptional people. They brought the temperate and industrious habits of the province to Paris, and did not allow themselves to be corrupted by the great city. Their little shop at Ménilmontant flourished exceedingly. The two rooms behind the shop were the pink of neatness, and their one child, a boy of seven, was a model of obedience and good manners. Surrounded by so much that was foul and evil, they had contrived to keep themselves untainted by the infection of vice. They were the only intimate friends the Benoît girls could reckon upon in Paris ; but for acquaintance—the come-and-go society of Sundays and holidays—the Benoîts had all Madame Morice's circle, which consisted of the most respectable citizens of her quarter.

The Morices were sauntering up and down with half a dozen friends in front of the Fort when the four girls arrived. There was Mademoiselle Gilberte, the dressmaker, a stylish young person of five-and-thirty ; and there was Madame Beck, the clear-starcher, a matron whose purity of attire spoke well for her laundry-work ; also Madame Beck's son, a flaxen youth of nineteen, with not a word to say for himself, and with an embarrassing habit of blushing violently and goggling his eyes if he were looked at. There were Monsieur and Madame Callonge, from the smart little *boucherie* opposite Madame Morice's shop ; and lastly, there was a tall, broad-shouldered, and very handsome Monsieur whom the Benoît girls had never seen till to-day.

He wore a blue blouse and a workman's cap ; but one could see at a glance that his outer garments were spotless, and that his linen, as indicated by the white collar and wristbands, was that of a gentleman. Morice and Beck were both in broadcloth and stove-pipe hats, and Morice had gone so far as to encase his fingers in a pair of stiff yellow leather gloves ; and yet this man in the blue blouse looked more like a gentleman than either of them. His movements had an ease, his head was

carried with a lofty grace, which those others had not. He was strolling by Madame Morice's side, silent and thoughtful, as the four girls approached.

There was much cordiality in the greeting given to the Benoît girls by all the company except the man in blue, who was evidently a stranger. Lisbeth presented Pâquerette to Madame Morice as a little neighbour she had brought with her, and that was all the introduction needed. The grocer's wife smiled at her with a comfortable, protecting air, and murmured to Lisbeth that the child was *très gentille*, and then the gentlemen of the company took the baskets, and they all strolled off to find the prettiest part of the wood. It was a gay and busy world through which they went, a world of humble pleasure-seekers, somewhat loud in their mirth, but passing merry. There were wedding-parties among the crowd, couples who had been wedded on Saturday in order to secure Sunday for a second day of revelry. There were circles seated on the grass at their picnic breakfast; youths and lasses playing hide and seek or blind-man's buff among the stunted bushes in an atmosphere of dust and sunshine. Blue blouses, crimson trousers, white bridal gowns made a vivid variety of colour against the turf, which looked green in the distance, although it was rusty and trodden almost to extinction by the multitude of feet. Yonder glanced blue water under the bright spring sky. Pâquerette thought the whole scene bewilderingly beautiful.

While they were walking in quest of a retired glade Madame Morice, who was a great gossip, told big Lisbeth about the stranger in the blue blouse. He was from Brittany, a stone-mason, engaged on the fortifications yonder, and he had lately moved into an apartment on the top front floor above her shop. He was a very superior person—sober, saving, and almost a gentleman in his ways. He sat up late at night studying sometimes. She had seen his lamp from the road when she and her husband came home from a theatre; but let him study never so late, he was always off to his work in the early morning. She had heard that he was a staunch Republican, and had grand ideas about the equal rights of man. She had made his acquaintance through her little boy Adolphe, who had been nearly run over, when this good fellow, Ishmael, picked him up from under the very feet of a pair of waggon-horses.

'Can you wonder that I have liked him ever since?' she said. 'Morice cultivates his society for the sake of his conversation—they are of the same way of thinking, and neither of them trusts too securely in the Prince President, or this new law which the Chamber passed the other day.'

Lisbeth was no Republican. She had liked and admired the Citizen King and his family—that pious, charitable queen, those princesses, fond of sculpture and poetry, needle-work, and all pure feminine arts. The revolution of '48 had seemed to Lisbeth an unmitigated calamity, and the people who made it were devils in her eyes. She admired Prince Louis Napoleon for the sake of those glorious traditions which are as fairy tales to the children of France. She knew her Béranger, and, in the songs of the national poet, had learned the history of the Empire that was gone. If those people who prophesied the coming of a new Empire were right, so much the better. Anything was better than a Republic, which seemed a colourless, hopeless kind of Government—a Chamber always at logger-heads, a flock without a shepherd.

Madame Morice and her party found a little glade, a somewhat secluded spot, in which to picnic, and as everybody seemed pretty sharp set by five o'clock, they all sat down at that hour to open the baskets and arrange the meal. The gentlemen of the party provided the wine, and some *limonade gazeuse* had been brought by the thoughtful Morice for those ladies who might not care for such strong drinks as macon or ordinaire. It was a very sober party, but very cheerful notwithstanding, with much talk and laughter; and the paucity of accommodation in the way of knives and forks, plates and glasses, gave occasion to many small jokes of an ancient and innocent character. Thus big Lisbeth and the stone-mason, on sharing their meal off a common plate, were called the *ménage* Ishmael, and various insinuations of a matrimonial kind were levelled at them, all which Lisbeth bore with strong-minded placidity. But when Pâquerette presently sipped a little wine out of the stone-mason's glass, the first jesting remark made the pale face flush crimson.

'She is so shy, *la pauvrette*,' said Pauline to Madame Morice. 'A word frightens her.'

'She is rather pretty,' said Madame; 'and she has the air of a demoiselle.'

'You would not have said that if you had seen her this morning before we took her in hand,' replied Pauline, with a natural pride in her work.

Before they had finished dinner, a gray-haired old organ-player came and perched himself near them, and began to drone out his old airs—'The Carnival of Venice,' '*La ci darem*,' '*Non piu mesta*,' and a waltz or two. The waltz tunes inspired the little party. Why should not one have a dance?—just for digestion. A word, and the thing was done. The plates were thrust into the empty baskets; every one was on foot; partners

were chosen; Pâquerette found herself, she hardly knew how, gliding round in a circle, supported by the strong arm of Monsieur Ishmael. The shy youth with eyes *à fleur de tête* summoned courage to invite Pauline.

The copper-faced, weather-beaten old organ-player ground on, a villainous music, but with a swing and a rhythm which guided the feet of the dancers, and seemed to them, in the inspiration of the moment—summer air, blue sky, youth, hope, and freshness—as the music of the spheres. It was in their own pulses, in their own young hearts, the melody was sounding; the rhythmical drone of the organ was only the outer husk of that inner and spiritual melody, the mere mechanical beat which kept time with the music of newly-awakening hopes and loves.

Pâquerette had never learned to dance; but in these light, slim slips of girlhood dwells the very spirit of motion. Like an Æolian harp which has hung in the stillness of a closed chamber, silent for years, but, let a summer wind breathe on the strings, and the music comes; so with Pâquerette! At the sound of the Savoyard's organ, with the sense of a strong arm encircling her waist, her feet slid lightly over the dry, close turf, and every movement of that slender figure and those little feet was supple, graceful, harmonious, as in a dancer of highest artistic training. There are some arts that come by instinct to certain people, and Pâquerette was a born dancer.

'Hurrah!' cried the middle-aged lookers on, applauding the three couples, but with their eyes on Ishmael and his partner; and 'Hurrah!' echoed Ishmael, drawing his partner a little closer to his breast, light-hearted, elated, he scarce knew why.

The other two couples stopped breathless and panting, and stood aloof out of the little circle of sunburnt greensward; but Ishmael and his partner waltzed on, unconscious that they were alone, unconscious of spectators, feeling like two birds with outspread wings hovering in a world of light and air, steeped in blue sky and sunshine, far above this common earth.

When they at last came to a stop, the girl's head dropped upon her partner's shoulder in a sudden giddiness. It seemed to her as if they had swooped down from that blue, bright world, and that it was the shock of touching the earth again which made her senses reel and her sight grow dim.

She recovered herself almost immediately, and released herself from Ishmael's supporting arm.

'Thank you,' she said naïvely. 'How delicious dancing is!'

'And how exquisitely you dance!' answered Ishmael, looking at her with eyes which seemed to her to glow and dazzle like the sun-rays that meet on a burning glass.

'Please do not laugh at me, Monsieur; I never danced with any one in my life until to-day. I have danced by myself in the yard sometimes when there was an organ; but, of course, that is different.'

'I am very glad of that,' said Ishmael.

'Glad of what?'

'That I am the first partner you ever danced with. That makes a beginning in life, does it not?—a kind of landmark. And now shall we go for a little walk? You are breathless still. We must not dance any more just yet.'

He offered his arm, through which she slipped her little ungloved hand after an instant or so of hesitation. She had never taken any man's arm before. Miranda, in her desert island, could hardly have been more innocent of the manners and ways of the outer world. Ishmael looked down at her wonderingly, admiringly. He had seen many more beautiful women since he had lived in Paris: the women at the theatres, for instance—dazzling, gorgeous creatures, with eyes that flashed liquid light, complexions of ivory or alabaster. He had seen aristocratic loveliness go by him in carriages—patrician beauty innocent of the actress's art; for in those days ladies of rank had not taken to rouge and enamel. This slender thing, stealing a little upward glance at him now and then, tremulously, was splendid neither in form nor colour. Yet there was an aristocratic refinement in the almost too delicate features—the little nose so finely chiselled, yet undecided between the Greek and the *retroussé*, the small round chin sloping somewhat weakly at the base, and the pure half-tints of the pale complexion, the violet blue of the large dreamy eyes, with their long auburn lashes and pencilled brows. No Joan of Arc or Agnes Sorel type of woman this, but rather of the Louise de la Vallière mould—a woman to sin, her heart being tempter, and to be sorry for her sin for ever after.

'Pâquerette,' murmured Ishmael, thoughtfully, perceiving the relation between the white spring flower and this pale fragile prettiness; 'were you christened Pâquerette?'

'I don't know,' she answered, childishly; 'I don't remember.'

'Of course not,' he said, smiling at her simplicity; 'one does not usually remember one's baptism. But have you no other name?'

'Not that I know of. My grandfather once said that he called me Pâquerette because I was such a poor white little thing when he first took care of me.'

'And you have neither father nor mother living?

'Neither,' sighed Pâquerette.

'Can you remember your parents, or did they both die while you were a baby?'

He was not questioning her out of idle curiosity, or with the idea of making conversation, while they strolled by the shabby, dusty trees in the people's much-trampled wood. He wanted to get nearer to this pale flower-like creature; to know how this delicate spray could have shot forth from the rugged tree of hard-working humanity.

'I never saw either father or mother,' the girl answered, sadly. 'I used to think till a year ago that my grandfather and his wife were my father and mother, only a good deal older than other girls' fathers and mothers. And then some one in the house—the old tinman on the fifth floor, who lived there before I was born—told me that my mother died while she was young. She was very pretty, he said. He remembered her when she was smaller and younger than I am now. I asked him why she died so young, but he did not know. She went away, and then she came back with me, and then she died, and was buried among the poor people at Père Lachaise. There is no cross to tell where she lies. I have gone there sometimes on a Sunday afternoon, and walked about over the long grass under which she is lying with so many others, all nameless. And after a few years the great common grave will be opened again, and more coffins will be put in till it is full—the dead lying above and below each other in crowds, just as the living are crowded story above story in the big houses like ours.'

'It is hard,' said Ishmael, setting his teeth, for to this staunch Republican all inequalities of rank and wealth seemed hard, 'but it will not always be so. The living and the dead will have their rights by-and-by. The hewers of wood and drawers of water will not always be flung into a common grave. I remember hearing something of a new law made last winter, which was to secure decent burial for the poor. And so you live with your grandfather and grandmother, Mademoiselle Pâquerette,' he went on. 'I suppose they are very fond of you?'

He fancied that the love of an old couple for an orphan grandchild must be something over and above the common love of parents—tenderer, more blindly indulgent.

'They are not always unkind,' Pâquerette answered, innocently.

'Not always. Are they ever unkind to you?'

'Sometimes. They are very poor. Grandfather works very hard—now and then. He makes beautiful things—bureaux or escritoires for the furniture-dealers. But he cannot always sell what he has made for a good price; and then he gets unhappy

and very angry with grandmother and me. And they both have to take a good deal of wine and brandy for their rheumatism : and when one is old that gets into one's head, and one does not know what one says or does.'

'I hope you never take wine or brandy, Mademoiselle Pâquerette,' Ishmael said earnestly.

'They never give me any—they have none to spare,' the gir answered with child-like simplicity ; 'and I hate the smell of the stuff. I have to fetch it for grandmother from the wineshop.'

'I hope you will always hate it,' said Ishmael. 'Strong drink is the curse of great cities. In Brittany nobody gets drunk ; we drink only cider. But there we are always in the fresh air—our brains are not dulled by the stifling atmosphere of small crowded rooms,' he continued, recalling that crowded wine-shop near his lodging where the men heated themselves and maddened themselves as they sat in the oven-like room, under the low blackened ceiling, drinking their coarse spirit and smoking their rank tobacco, and holding forth to one another with an eloquence that was ranker and coarser than potato brandy or cabbage-leaf tobacco, could Ishmael but have understood it aright.

He had to explain to Pâquerette where Brittany was, and what kind of a place. Her ignorance upon all possible subjects was of the densest. The whole world outside the Faubourg St.-Antoine and Père Lachaise was a blank to her. The faubourg was her only idea of town, the cemetery her sole notion of country. She listened to Ishmael's description of his native province with eyes that grew wider and wider with wonderment. The sea, what was it like? And rocks, what were those? Hills, valleys, orchards, windmills, river, willow-shaded, flocks of turkeys, processions of geese, broad stretches of yellow sand: everything had to be explained to her. Ishmael grew eloquent as he went on, full of enthusiasm for that dear land which he had left ; not for lack of love on his part, but because parental love was lacking there for him. He told Pâquerette all about the village of Pen-Hoël and its surroundings, and his own wild, free life there ; but he never mentioned the name of the place, or the château, or uttered a word which could indicate that he had been anything higher than a peasant in his native place. His past life was a profound secret, which he had no intention of revealing to any one. His youth and its belongings were dead and buried, and he stood alone—a young Cæsar who had just passed life's Rubicon, and had taken up arms against fate.

By-and-by came more dancing, while the sun went down in a sky of crimson and gold behind a meagre avenue of shabby limes, their spring foliage already tarnished with the dust of

the city, and while umber shadows stole across the scattered patches of scrubby wood and copse. The old Savoyard had sent his dog round among the company with a hat in his mouth, and had been so satisfied with the result, that he was smiling over his barrel-organ, and grinding away with renewed energy, while his faithful mongrel sat beside him, wagging a poor stump of a tail, the more ornamental half of which had been demolished piece by piece in various fights with other mongrels.

Again Pâquerette and Ishmael waltzed together to the old-fashioned 'Duc de Reichstadt' waltz, which enjoyed a revival of popularity just now on the organs of Paris, as a delicate compliment to him who called the dead boy cousin. Again the fair small head reclined against the stone-mason's stalwart shoulder, and the strong arm sustained the girl's slim figure, so that her little feet seemed to skim rather than to tread the dusty turf. They were dancing still when Pâquerette's friends began to urge the prudence of turning their faces homewards. Spring days may be ever so delicious, but spring evenings are always chilly. A cold wind was creeping up from the unseen river, the last gleam of gold and red had faded in the west. The world was a misty gray world under silvery stars, that were just beginning to glitter in a cold gray sky. The baskets had been packed with empty plates and glasses; the empty bottles—*alias* negroes—given as a perquisite to the old Savoyard. The day of rest and pleasure was over. Throughout the wood little parties of holiday folk were tramping homeward—fathers carrying sleepy children on their shoulders, mothers dragging babies in little chaise carts; lovers with arms wreathed round maidenly waists; here and there the red legs of a soldier striding towards the barrack; everywhere departure save where, silent and stealthy in the darkness of copse or grassy hollow, some homeless wretch watched the departing multitude, hopeful of being able to pass a quiet night under the stars unassailed by the authorities of the city.

Ishmael stopped reluctantly when the organ-grinder ground his last bar. He had danced many a waltz in the least disreputable dancing places of the workmen's quarter; but never had he felt the very inspiration of the dance as he had felt it to-day on the disadvantageous turf under the open sky. The *bastringues* yonder, even the best of them, reeked with odours of cheap wine and brandy, and a vile decoction of wine and spices known as *sang de bœuf*. Their very atmosphere was poisoned by bad company and evil language. Ishmael had always left such places disgusted with himself for having been induced to enter them; but to-day he had felt himself in respectable company; he had heard not one foul word. He felt that he

would like to see more of his little partner of to-day, of those three candid-looking, decent girls, her companions.

'Your little friend dances exquisitely,' he said to big Lisbeth. 'I think you must have taught her.'

'Not I, indeed,' answered Lisbeth, laughing at his implied compliment, so evidently meant to conciliate. 'She has taught herself, poor little thing, skimming about the yard, like a bird or a butterfly. The only joy she has had in life, I believe, has been to dance to the sound of an organ when one has chanced to come our way, which has not been often.'

'She seems to have had a very unhappy childhood, poor little thing!' said Ishmael, walking beside Lisbeth as they made their way towards the point at which the party was to disperse. He had no intention of leaving the four girls at that point, but meant to offer them his escort to their home.

'The old *trolleur* and his wife are an ogre and ogress, answered Lisbeth, indignantly. 'Figure to yourself, then, Monsieur, this is the first day's pleasure that poor thing has ever known; and if it were not for my cousin lending her a gown—but I ought not to speak of such things; only when one is angry——'

'You are right to feel angry. Poor child, poor child!'

So even the neat pink cotton frock, the modest muslin cap, were borrowed plumage. Poor little Cinderella! Hitherto Ishmael had believed his own unloved childhood to be altogether exceptional—a kind of martyrdom unknown before in the story of mankind. And here was this fragile girl, ever so much unhappier, steeped to the lips in squalid poverty, the drudge of a drunken old man and woman. The very thought of Fate's injustice towards this weakling made his blood boil. He looked down at the girl pityingly, tenderly almost, as he walked by her side along the dusty road. So pale, so delicate, wan and wasted even, in the very springtime of life! The bud had not unfolded into the blossom, and yet it was already faded. Such a faint snowdrop prettiness! He had admired women before to-night, had dreamed more than one dream of the passing moment; but he had never before been deeply interested in a woman's character, or a woman's fate. And Pâquerette interested him both ways. He wanted to know what kind of girl she was: he wanted to know all that could be known of her sad story.

'Let me see you home, Mademoiselle,' he said to Lisbeth, in whom he recognised the head of the Benoît family.

'Monsieur is very good. We thought of returning by the omnibus.'

'On such a lovely spring night? The omnibuses will be crowded to suffocation. It will be an affair of waiting till mid-

night for places. Don't you think it would be much pleasanter to walk home?'

'It is a long way,' said Lisbeth, pleased at the idea of saving so many sous; 'but if the others are not too tired——'

'Not at all,' protested Toinette. 'The night air is so fresh, I could walk to Asnières, or Bongival.'

'But Pâquerette, she has danced so much, she must be very tired,' said Pauline.

'Tired! Oh, no, not in the least,' cried Pâquerette. 'It will be delicious to walk home; although the omnibus was heavenly,' she added, gratefully remembering her first drive.

So they all set out along the dusty road, which was less arid now under the cool softness of night. Pâquerette found herself hanging upon Ishmael's arm somehow, just as in their first dance she had seemed to glide unconsciously into his arms. He had taken the little hand in his and slipped it through his arm with an air of mastery which implied protection, friendship, shelter, the guardianship of the strong over the weak.

He asked Pâquerette no questions about herself or her life as they walked back to the Faubourg St.-Antoine. After the story he had heard briefly from Lisbeth Benoît, he felt that it would be almost cruelty to touch upon the poor child's surroundings. He wanted to know more of her story; he was moved and interested as he had never been till now; but he felt that he must make his discoveries for himself, not from those delicate lips with their tint of pale rosebuds.

He spoke of himself, or rather, of his province, which was another part of himself, the orchards and fields, and winding river, the sea and rocks of that land where the borders of Normandy and Brittany almost touch across the narrow boundary of the Couësnon. He told her of that land of legends; of fairies, and of poulpicains, the impish husbands of fairies; of Druid monuments and haunted fountains; of Christian miracles and pagan shrines; told her of that good King Gradlon, of Cornuailles, who is to the Breton as King Arthur to the Cornishman. Never had Pâquerette been so interested. Her eager questions led the speaker on. Fairies, what were they? She had never heard of them. The sea? Ah, yes, she had heard often of the sea, and she longed to know what it was like—how big, what colour, and did it really roar in stormy weather, as her grandfather had told her, as if with the might of ten thousand lions? and did the waves really, really, rise mountains high, glistening walls of white water? and were there silvery shining lights upon the waves, which looked like enchantment, and only meant rotten fish? She longed, of all things, to behold the sea, and the country, and the vineyards and mountains

which the *charabia* had told her about when he sat smoking his pipe with her grandfather.

Ishmael inquired who this *charabia* was of whom she spoke as a familiar friend.

The *charabia* was grandfather's friend, Pâquerette told him. It was he who took away a piece of furniture when grandfather had finished it, and carried it round to the dealers. Sometimes he got a very good price, and then he stayed to supper, and there was a *fricot*, and grandmother made a *saladier* of wine *à la Française* afterwards, and then the *charabia* grew merry and talked of his native Auvergne. There were bad times, when nobody would give a fair price for the furniture; and then, when there was hardly bread to eat, the *charabia* came forward and bought grandfather's work himself rather than that they should all starve. Grandfather was a *trolleur*—a man who worked on his own account and sold his work to the dealers.

'The *charabia* must be a very benevolent person, or a rank thief,' said Ishmael. 'He is altogether a new character to me. What kind of a man is he?'

'Stout, broad-shouldered, with a dark face, and short black hair—not a very nice-looking man,' answered Pâquerette, simply; 'but grandfather says he means well, except when he is angry, and then he says the *charabia* is a blood-sucker, and is growing fat upon his flesh and bones. Grandmother says the *charabia* is rich, and that we ought to make much of him.'

'And you, Mademoiselle Pâquerette, do you like this Auvergnat?' asked Ishmael.

Pâquerette had never been called Mademoiselle until to-day. It was a kind of promotion.

'Like him—I?' she said, wonderingly. 'I don't think he cares very much whether I like or dislike him. He has hardly ever spoken to me; but he sits and stares at me sometimes with great black eyes, which almost frighten me. I have to fetch the wine and brandy when he comes to supper. I hate him,' she added, with a shudder; 'but I mustn't say so. You won't tell grandfather?'

'Not for the world, Mademoiselle. I am afraid, from the way you speak, that these grandparents of yours are not very kind to you.'

'They are not so kind as you,' the girl answered, softly, for there was a protecting friendliness in his tone which awakened in her a new sense of sympathy; 'but they do not mean to be unkind. It is only because life is so hard for them.'

They were near the Rue Sombreuil by this time, and in a few more minutes they entered the gloomy archway of the common lodging-house—not so large as those barracks of a

hundred rooms, to be built a few years later under the Haussmann rule, but large enough to hold a good deal of misery and foulness of all kinds. The yard looked very dreary in the faint light of a moon which was just rising above the towers of Notre Dame. A guttering candle flared with a yellowish flame upon the bare old table in the *trolleur's* room. The door was open, and Mère Lemoine was standing in the doorway gossiping with a neighbour. She wore a smart little coloured shawl over her shabby gown, and her Sunday cap, which was an interesting specimen of dirty finery. She was in that condition which her friends called *poivre*, and had the peculiar solemnity of manner which sometimes goes with that state.

'It is that *torchon* at last!' she exclaimed. 'Don't you think you have given me enough of inquietude this evening, *p'tite gredine*, roaming the streets after dark, you that have been brought up as carefully as a Mam'selle? And now'—with a suppressed hiccough—'you come home with a strange Monsieur in a blouse!'

Pâquerette and Ishmael had the start of the others by some five minutes.

'You knew I was with kind friends, grandmother,' said the girl. 'This gentleman came home with me. Mam'selle Benoît and her cousins are just behind us.'

On this Mère Lemoine curtseyed to the stranger with a dignified air, and regretted that her husband was not at home to invite him to supper; but if he would break a crust with them, he would be heartily welcome.

Ishmael, moved by curiosity about Pâquerette, or interest in Pâquerette, snapped at the invitation.

'I dined too well to be able to eat anything,' he said, 'but I should not be sorry to rest for a little while without deranging Madame. It is nearly five miles from Vincennes, though the walk seemed a mere *bagatelle;* and I have a longish way to go to my lodgings.'

Madame Lemoine threw up her hands in wonderment. 'They had walked all the way from Vincennes! That *paresseuse* of hers, for example, who always loitered on every errand! Wonders would never cease.'

'It was a lovely walk,' said Pâquerette. 'Mademoiselle Benoît asked me if I would rather go in the omnibus, and it was my own choice to walk. You are not tired, are you, Monsieur?' appealing to Ishmael. 'I feel as if I could walk five miles more.'

'Tired? no, Mademoiselle, not absolutely tired; but I should be glad to rest for a little quarter of an hour.'

The Benoît girls were parting with the goggle-eyed youth and his sister under the archway. Pâquerette flew across to them as they came into the yard to thank them for their goodness to her.

'And the gown?' she said. 'Shall I come up to your room and change it for my own?'

'Not to-night, child,' answered Pauline, kindly; 'you must be tired after that long walk. I will bring down your things at six o'clock to-morrow morning, and then you can return me mine. I suppose you are always up at six?'

'I will be up at six to-morrow morning,' answered Pâquerette, ashamed to own the lateness of her normal hour. What was there to induce early rising in that ground-floor den, where the *trolleur* and his wife sometimes slept half through the sunny forenoon, coiled in the darkness of their hole like dogs in a kennel?

The Benoît girls kissed Pâquerette, wished Ishmael a brief good-night, and ran off to their dingy staircase. Ten o'clock was striking from the tower of Notre Dame—not a very dissipated hour, albeit Mère Lemoine pretended to be shocked at the lateness of her granddaughter's return.

Ishmael was invited to walk into the living-room, and to seat himself in the *trolleur's* greasy old Voltaire, an heirloom which had grown dirtier and more rickety year by year during Pâquerette's progress from baby to girl, but which was still regarded as the acme of comfort. The stranger looked round the room wonderingly. There was not one feature to redeem the all-pervading dreariness; even the fine old walnut-wood *armoire*, tall, capacious, a relic of old-world industry and comfort, had been degraded from its sober antique beauty by neglect and hard usage. The brass lock and hinges had fallen into disrepair; the heavy door yawned ajar, revealing a heterogeneous collection of old clothes, crockery, boots, hardware, and empty wine bottles. Nothing in the room suggested neat or careful habits in the occupants. In one corner the cabinet-maker's bench stood above a heap of shavings which must have been accumulating for weeks; in another a basket of tools had been flung down anyhow among dirty plates and saucepans. A greasy pack of cards on the table beside the battered brass candlestick showed how Mère Lemoine and her gossip had been amusing themselves.

Not a primrose or a spray of wallflower from the flower-market; not one sign of womanly niceness, of the household fairy's care, in all the room. Ishmael sighed as he glanced at Pâquerette, who stood shyly beside the smoky hearth, straight, slim, fragile-looking in her white and pink raiment.

'Poor child,' he said to himself, 'she looks sweet and innocent as a spring flower in the woods at Pen-Hoël; but what honest man would ever dare to marry a girl from such a home as this?'

While Ishmael sat beside the hearth replying to the grandmother's polite interrogatories, Père Lemoine came in, unexpectedly early, unexpectedly sober. He had not been to 'The Faithful Pig,' but to a political meeting of *ebénistes* in a wine-shop in the Rue de la Roquette, where they assembled secretly in a back room, and in fear of the police, all such meetings at this time being illegal. Although he had taken his glass or two, he was in a perfectly respectable condition, full of the meeting, and of the importance of the syndicate of cabinet-makers, of which he was only an outsider.

'But they know that I can speak,' he said, proudly, 'those scoundrels of the Left. I am not good enough to be one of their syndicate, a poor devil who lives from hand to mouth, works as the whim seizes him, as all true artists have always worked, from Palissy downwards. They let me speak, for they know I am not without eloquence. They have called me sometimes their old Danton—the mouth of thunder—the lion-headed one. There is again a talk of a *coup d'état*. He—Prince Louis Bonaparte—has sworn that there is no such thing in his thoughts; but the *ebénistes* neither trust him nor the Chamber—and the *ebénistes* are a power in Paris. Let the Elysée and the Chamber look to it. The pulses of the national heart beat here—the life-blood of France ebbs and flows here!'

'Monsieur, here, is no friend to the President,' said Mère Lemoine; 'he is a man after your own heart.'

'Pardon, Madame,' answered Ishmael, 'I have been in Paris only half a year. I reserve my opinion. If Louis Bonaparte means well to the people, I am with him heart and hand. But I wait to know more of the Prince President and his policy. He has dealt fairly with France so far, and this rumour of an impending *coup d'état* may be groundless. It was talked of nearly a year ago, and has not come yet.'

'The time has not come—the necessity has not come,' said Lemoine, fresh from the secret discussion at the wine-shop. 'Wait till the sands are running out in the glass; wait till that man's day of power is waning; and then see what he will do to keep the sceptre in his hand. Remember the Consulate and the Empire. Remember the *18th Brumaire*. We shall see the same game played over again by an inferior player. Louis Bonaparte has the army at his back. It was said to-night by one who knows that Courtigis, the general in command at Vincennes, has orders to fire upon the Faubourg with the biggest

of his cannon in case of insurrection, while three regiments of cavalry are to clear the streets and sabre every insurgent who ventures out of his hole. If necessary, he is to burn every house in the Faubourg. It will be a fierce struggle, friend; but I hope when the fight comes you will be found on our side.'

'I shall be on the side of liberty and right, be sure of that,' answered Ishmael.

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## CHAPTER X

### 'MY SOUL FAILED WHEN HE SPAKE'

ISHMAEL saw no more of Pâquerette for nearly a month after that night in May, although he asked Madame Morice more than once during that time why she did not organise another picnic with those nice girls her friends of the Faubourg St. Antoine. Madame Morice had other plans, or the Benoît girls were otherwise engaged. He might have found some excuse for calling in the Rue Sombreuil had he so chosen; but he shrank with loathing from that dingy room, half workshop, half kitchen—the *trolleur* in his greasy blouse, the *trolleur's* wife with her crafty questions, her bloodshot eyes, looks as evil as those of the fabulous witches dear to his native province. He was sorry for Pâquerette; he sympathised with the innocent, helpless creature, whose youth had been overshadowed by this ogre and ogress. But to choose a wife from such a den—he, with manly aspirations and gentle blood in his veins—no, that was not possible. Neither was it possible for him to entertain one dishonourable wish about that childlike creature. And yet he ardently desired to see Pâquerette again; out of curiosity, out of a purely philanthropic yearning to be of some good to so unhappy a being.

One Saturday afternoon, just before midsummer, Ishmael, coming home from work earlier than usual, heard a shrill confusion of voices in the little room behind Madame Morice's shop. The door was half open to the common passage, to admit such summer airs as might wander that way, and Madame Morice caught sight of the blouse going by.

'It is Monsieur Ishmael himself,' she cried. 'Come in, if you please, Monsieur. You have been asking me about picnics for the last three weeks, and now is your opportunity. The

demoiselles Benoît and I have been discussing a grand *fête* for to-morrow.'

'I am with you, ladies,' answered Ishmael. 'I wish I had a big balloon and could carry you all off to Brittany by to-morrow evening. It is the feast of St. John, our greatest festival. When the sun goes down every rock and every hill begins to shine with its bonfire in honour of *Monsieur St. Jean*—a hundred fires, a thousand fires, all sparkling and gleaming in the twilight. And then comes the joyous sound of music, and a procession of girls in their holiday clothes come to dance round the fires. She who can dance round nine bonfires before the first stroke of midnight will have a husband before the year is out. And the farmers bring their beasts to pass them through the sacred fire—sure safeguard against cattle disease for ever after. And from valley to valley sound the shepherds' horns calling and answering each other through the night; and beside many a fire there are placed empty chairs, that the spirits of the beloved dead may come and sit there to hear the songs and watch the dances.'

'What a strange people you Bretons are!' exclaimed Madame Morice.

'We are a people who honour our ancestors and believe in their God,' answered Ishmael, gravely. 'It seems to me sometimes that in Paris you have neither the memory of the past, nor a creed in the present.'

'We remember our revolutions,' replied Madame Morice, whose husband was a politician; 'they are the landmarks in our history.'

'You were discussing a picnic,' said Ishmael.

The three Benoît girls and Madame Morice were seated round a table furnished with dainty little white cups and saucers, a plate of delicate biscuits, and a *chocolatière* which breathed odours of vanille. As a grocer's wife, Madame could afford to entertain her friends with such luxuries once in a way. She handed Ishmael one of the little toy cups and saucers, which he took with the air of an elephant picking up a pin.

'Yes, we were talking of a grand excursion,' answered practical Lisbeth Benoît; 'but I am afraid it is too far, and will cost too much. We want to go to Marly-le-Roi, and spend the day in the woods, and have a picnic dinner at a restaurant in the village, where there is a nice little garden with an arbour in which one can dine. Madame Morice knows all about it. We went there on her sister's wedding-day. The people are civil, and the dinner not too expensive. But the journey there and back—that is a serious question.'

The three Benoît girls shook their heads gravely.

There arose a serious discussion. There was the railway fare

to a certain station on the line, which only took them about half way to Marly-le-Roi, and then there was the diligence, and then the dinner. It would cost at least twelve francs a head, all told, travelling third class on the railway and in the cheapest part of the diligence, and limiting the dinner to bouillon, bouilli, salad, and dessert.

It seemed a frightful price to pay for one day's pleasure, but then, what a delight it is to escape out of the dust of Paris into the real country, the grand old royal forest, the village which could not be more primitive were it a hundred miles from the metropolis! The Benoît girls had given themselves no pleasure since that day at Vincennes. They had been saving their money for some stupendous festival; and this idea of Marly, which they had seen and admired so intensely two years ago, had obtained possession of them.

Bougival—Asnières? No: they wanted the forest, the old forsaken fountains, the water-pools, the memories of a stately past.

So, after an infinitude of talk, calculation, argumentation, it was finally settled that they should all go to Marly. It was to be a small, select party this time. Madame Morice's married sister and her husband, Monsieur and Madame Dulac, were to be invited to join, and would doubtless be charmed to revisit scenes associated with the tender memories of a wedding-day. But no one else was to be asked. There should be no risk of grumbling and recrimination at the costliness of the day's pleasure. And, again, a diligence will only accommodate a certain number. A large party is always difficult to manage *en voyage*.

Ishmael began to look blank.

'Your friend, Mademoiselle Pâquerette, you will take her, will you not?' he asked, appealing to Lisbeth.

Mademoiselle Benoît sighed and shrugged her shoulders.

'Not possible,' she said. 'Poor little Pâquerette would dearly love to go, I am sure; but that wicked old *trolleur* would not give her twelve francs for a day's pleasure; though I dare say he spends twice as much every week at "The Faithful Pig."'

'But you might pay for her, Mademoiselle Benoît,' said Ishmael, eagerly. 'That is to say, you might allow me to find the money, and say nothing about it to Mademoiselle Pâquerette. She is only a child; she would never ask who paid for her.'

'She is little more than a child, I admit,' replied the practical, outspoken Lisbeth; 'and yet I hardly know if it is a right thing to do. You seem to admire Pâquerette very much, Monsieur: I hope you mean well by her.'

'Monsieur Ishmael means well by all the world. I will answer for that,' interjected Madame Morice.

Ishmael reddened a little at this.

'Believe me that I am incapable of one evil thought in regard to your poor little friend,' he answered, gravely. 'Perhaps you go a shade too far when you say I admire her. I am very sorry for her, poor child; such a blighted girlhood is a thing to give every honest man the heartache. But I own that, if Mademoiselle Pâquerette were ever so much handsomer and ever so much more fascinating, I should hardly go to the *trolleur's* den in search of a wife.'

'Precisely,' said Lisbeth; 'and, since that is so, I should think the less you and Pâquerette meet the better.'

'What nonsense, Lisbeth!' cried Pauline. 'Why should you deny poor little Pâquerette a day's pleasure, which Monsieur was so generous as to offer her out of sheer compassion? Pâquerette is not so silly as to misunderstand his kindness; and think what rapture it would be to her to see the woods and the real country, and to dine under green leaves in a garden full of roses and carnations. It would be too cruel to deprive her of such a pleasure.'

'There are some sweets that leave a bitter taste afterwards,' said Lisbeth; but the rest of the party took no more notice of her than the Trojans of Cassandra. They were all on Ishmael's side. What other feeling than pure pity could he entertain for such a poor little waif as Pâquerette, and why deprive her of the kindness he so generously offered? Lisbeth was overruled. The hour for meeting at the railway station was fixed, and Ishmael bade the ladies good afternoon, and went up to his own room under the tiles.

Ishmael's apartment was in every way different from the *trolleur's* den in the Rue Sombreuil. He had furnished his lodging himself, with divers substantial pieces of furniture picked up at the second-hand dealers. A fine old cherry-wood *armoire*, solid and substantial as the cabinet work of Rennes or Vitry; a mahogany bureau, style First Empire, ponderous, ungraceful, but passing good of its kind. The little iron bedstead in a corner was screened by a chintz curtain. There were four rush-bottomed chairs, a writing-table in the window, and two deal shelves of Ishmael's own making, filled with useful books, chiefly on mechanics, for this young man had set himself to learn the constructive arts in all their bearing on his trade of mason and builder. He had taken up mathematics also, of which he had learned only the elements from good Père Bressant, of Pen-Hoël.

The room was kept with the purity and neatness of a monastic

cell. Here, at the little stove in the corner, Ishmael brewed his coffee in the early morning; here, late into the night, he sat at yonder writing-table, studying, reading, thinking, inventing; for that busy brain of his was full of plans and visions—bridges yet to be built, railways in the far future, aqueducts, viaducts, new roads, new levels. For at least three nights out of seven he gave himself up to hard study, locking his door upon the outside world, lighting his lamp in the early dusk, and working till the small hours. Then, after, perhaps, but three hours' sound sleep on his hard pallet, he was up again, brewing his coffee, and off to his work in the chilly morning, while the market carts were slowly rumbling into the city laden with fruit and vegetables from distant gardens, and great mountains of sea-fish and river-fish were being sold by auction, and the stomach of Paris, yonder by St.-Eustache, the great central market, was only just beginning its daily functions.

There were other nights which Ishmael spent out of doors; but these nights were not wasted in the haunts of vice or folly. The young workman had entered with heart and soul into the thronging life of Parisian politics. He went with the representatives of the Left in their championship of Republican ideas, their dreams of an ideal Republic—universal suffrage, universal enlightenment. He was a member of two Republican societies; adored Victor Hugo; spoke on occasion, and was no mean orator; and he was willing to shed his blood in support of his opinions should the hour of conflict come. He knew that among the class with which his lot was cast there were many doubtful specimens, many vile examples of the *genus* working-man; but it seemed to him that the great heart of the people was a noble and a true heart, and that the faults and sins of the people were the faults and sins of circumstance. In a life where there were so many elements of degradation, so few of refinement, so many temptations to baseness, so few inducements to lofty thoughts, he did not look for ideal perfection; but he saw the rudiments of perfectability, and he told himself that, with better surroundings and a better education, the working-men of Paris would shrink with horror from the low wine-shop and the lower dancing-room, which now constituted the paradise of their idle hours: would turn with loathing from the abject houris of the *bastringue*, the sordid sirens of the Passage Ménilmontant, or the Rue des Filles-Dieu. He had seen what their pleasures were, and had recoiled shuddering from the edge of that loathsome gulf into which so many had gone down. He lived among them, won their liking, and yet was not of them.

He thought of his lost home sometimes as he walked back from his work, thought of the half-brothers he had loved so

well, and wondered what they were doing in the quiet eventide, and whether they still missed their playmate. He was not angry with his father for the hard words that had hastened his exodus from the old home. He knew that the stepmother's venomous hate had been the true cause of all unkindness on his father's part, helped not a little by those bitter memories of the past which had set a brand upon the eldest son from the very beginning. He was not angry with Fate for having banished him from his birthplace—for having landed him on a lower level in life. He had an indomitable belief in his own power to climb. Already—though he had not been a year in Paris—he had achieved a reputation for superior skill and superior industry. He could command good wages. He saw before him a future in which he would be able to save money—to buy a plot or two of land, perhaps—in those desert wastes and outskirts between the exterior boulevards and the fortifications, where land was so cheap, and where it might some day be of much greater value. The coming time was to be an age of improvements. Railways were altering the face of the earth. The builder would play an important part in all the undertakings of the future. Already Ishmael imagined a time in which he was to be an employer of labour. His workmen should not be crowded in filthy holes, or given over to Satan and all his works. He would found a brotherhood of industry and temperance. He would build a lay monastery—a mighty barrack for workmen and their families, full of light, and air, and cleanliness. Men so lodged would be healthier and stronger, better physically and morally; better workmen, giving better value for their wages. Ishmael did not foresee that perfect machinery of trade-unionism which forbids the individual man to work better than his brothers, and insists upon the minimum of labour all round.

Father Bressant's money had long been returned to him out of Ishmael's savings, and the apartment at Ménilmontant had been furnished from the same source. An occasional letter from the good priest told Ishmael how the little world of Pen-Hoël was going on. Monsieur de Caradec was fairly well—he had hunted and shot a little in the season; but he had an air of not being altogether happy. Madame was an invalid always, as of old; but the doctor laughed, and said her complaint was only a chronic peevishness, which was likely to increase with years. The two boys throve splendidly, and their growth was visible to the eye. Next winter Father Bressant was to begin their education, and prepare them for the Polytechnic at Rennes.

Midsummer and the woods of Marly. What could be a more delicious combination? Pâquerette, joyous, though a little

ashamed of herself in another borrowed gown, thought that heaven itself could hardly be so lovely as this forest glade in which she was wandering with big Lisbeth and Ishmael—a glade where the sunshine glinted athwart tremulous semi-transparent leaves, and sprinkled the mossy ground with flecks of emerald light that looked like jewels. All the way they came from the city to the village seemed to have been between groves of flowering acacias; the atmosphere was full of their subtle perfume. Pâquerette's nostrils had never inhaled such sweet odours. And the sky and the water! never had she imagined such a lovely azure. Surely the sky above the Rue Sombreuil was of a different colour.

A faint rose-flush lighted her pale cheeks as she walked in that leafy glade, and listened respectfully, yet understanding very little, while Ishmael expounded the political situation—the chances for and against a *coup d'état*, or a tranquil termination of the Prince President's term of power—to Lisbeth, who had a masculine intellect, read newspapers, and was deeply interested in public affairs.

'A new era has come,' she said. 'We loved the Citizen King and his good queen for their own sakes—kind, harmless people wishing good to all classes—but under a Republic one feels that the people count for much more—have a right to know how they are being governed—and to question and to understand every act of the Chamber.'

'It is a pleasure to meet a lady who is interested in public matters,' answered Ishmael, understanding that this little speech of Lisbeth's was in some wise an apology.

Pâquerette strayed away from them every now and then to gather flowers, or to examine mosses or butterflies, like a happy child. The wood was all-sufficient for her happiness. The sunshine, the sweet air, the sense of mystery in those aisles of glancing sunlight and flickering shades, the idea of a glad, green world stretching away and away into immeasurable distance, the first vague dawning sense of the infinite stealing over a mind that had never before understood anything beyond the squalidest, saddest realities—all this was a kind of intoxication, and Pâquerette flew from flower to flower, screaming with rapture at the vision of a butterfly, lifted out of herself and off the common earth by this new delight.

The prudent Lisbeth had made up her mind that Ishmael and Pâquerette were not to be left too much alone. That long walk from Vincennes, in which they had gone so far ahead of the rest, seeming so engrossed in each other, had aroused the wise damsel's suspicions. It was all very well for Ishmael to protest that he only pitied the poor child. All the world knows

that pity is akin to love ; and, since he had said that he would not take a wife from that hole in the Rue Sombreuil, there was an end of the matter. Poor little Pâquerette's heart must not be broken. So in all their ramblings—and they went half the way to St.-Germain—Lisbeth took care to be near her *protégée*.

That did not prevent Ishmael talking to Pâquerette, or Pâquerette hanging upon his words with obvious delight. She did not listen while he talked politics : those were dark to her. But, seeing her rapture in flowers and trees and all living things, he began to talk of these, telling her the names of flowers, the habits of insects and birds, squirrels, rabbits, weasels, moles, field-mice, water-rats—all the free creatures that haunt woods and waterpools. They had been the companions of his boyhood, his books, his study.

'How can you bear to live in a great town, where there are no such things ?' Pâquerette asked, wonderingly.

'I endure my life in the town because I look forward to the day when I shall be able to have my nest in the country,' he answered. 'Not to live there always. Life among woods and fields is a long pastoral dream, an everlasting idyl. A man must have work, movement, progress ; and those he can only have at their best in a great centre like Paris. But it is worth while to toil for a week in stony places for one such day as this at the end of the six.'

'I can understand that,' said Pâquerette. 'And now tell me about your own country, as you told me that night—the fairies, the saints, the sacred fires, the sea and the fishing-boats, the wild-boar hunt in which you were nearly killed.'

Ishmael laughed and reddened.

'I am afraid I talked of nothing but myself that night,' he said.

'I like to hear you talk of yourself,' she answered simply.

By the time they went back to the village street of Marly Pâquerette had a lapful of wild flowers, mosses, twigs, tufts of grass, toadstools, and coloured pebbles, which she had collected in her woodland walk. She carried her treasures frankly in the skirt of her cotton frock, not ashamed of showing the clean white petticoat and stockings, albeit her shoes were of the shabbiest. The feet in the well-worn shoes were small and slender, like the bare hands which held up the bundle of flowers and mosses.

'I must get a basket for you to carry home your botanical collection,' said Ishmael, laughing at her enthusiasm ; and while the rest of the party were settling down at the humble eating-house and exploring the little garden in which they were to dine, Ishmael went all over the village to find a shop where he could buy a basket for Pâquerette.

He was not a man to fail in any quest, great or small, and he appeared in the garden with a capacious willow basket hanging over his arm just as the others were going to sit down to their soup without him. There was a little coloured straw twisted in among the willow, and the basket was altogether the smartest and best he had been able to buy. Pâquerette gave a little cry of joy when she was told that this beautiful thing was for her. Not since the brass thimble given her by Lisbeth had she received anything that could be called a gift. She trembled and turned pale with delight as she flung herself down on the grass with the basket in her lap, and began to arrange her treasures—her oak-apples, and golden-bright toadstools, and foxgloves, red and white, and clusters of dog-roses, and long trails of woodbine, and feathery fern-fronds in all the freshness of their midsummer green. She forgot all about dinner, though the soup tureen was steaming on the table in the arbour.

'What a child she is!' exclaimed Madame Morice, looking at the slender figure sitting in the sunshine, the small oval face bent over spray and blossom, pale and delicate as the eglantine bloom in the tremulous hand.

'Come to dinner, Mademoiselle Pâquerette, or your soup will be cold,' cried Morice, a middle-aged and somewhat obese personage, whose love of a good table had stamped itself upon his honest face in the form of pimples. When any friend of the grocer's ventured to allude to those pimples, he always declared that they were of a kind that came from poorness of blood, and that it was a duty which he owed himself not to lower his diet.

It was Monsieur Morice who had ordered the dinner at the village *auberge* before they started for their woodland ramble; and he had not restricted himself to the Spartan simplicity which his wife and the Benoît girls had proposed yesterday. He had made a bargain with the innkeeper for a dinner at three francs a head—such a dinner as in Paris would have cost at least six, he told the others triumphantly after the compact had been made.

There was a *bouillon à la bonne femme*, a *consommé* with poached eggs floating in it, over which Morice smacked his lips. Then came a piece of beef, boiled to rags, but made savoury with gherkins, and mustard, and vinegar. After that followed a *chapon en blanquette*, creamy, velvety, which was discussed in solemn silence, as too beautiful for words. Then came a dish of *petits pois au lard*, and anon a salad, made by the worthy Morice himself, with intense gravity; and, to crown the whole, a large dish of *œufs à la neige*, which appeared simultaneously with a dessert of strong Gruyère, Savoy biscuits, and wood

strawberries. Pâquerette had never even dreamed of such a dinner, yet she was too excited to eat much. Ishmael stole a look across the table every now and then to see how she was getting on. She had a delicate way of eating, child of the people though she was—a delicacy which came from utter indifference to those pleasures of the table which to the worthy Morice yonder were a kind of religion. She reminded Ishmael of his stepmother. She had the same air of fragility, of being made of too fine a clay for her surroundings. And yet she was the grandchild of those two dreadful people in the Rue Sombreuil—the woman with the solemn, slow speech, the fishy eye, and fixed stare of the habitual tippler; the old man with the brandy-nose and fevered breath, reeking of *trois-six*. It was out of that hideous den she had come—to that degraded type she belonged. What could she be to him ever? Nothing but a creature to pity and help in somewise if it were possible. All through that long dinner, which Morice and his fellow-banquetters protracted to the uttermost by their deliberate enjoyment of every dish, gloating over the unaccustomed daintinesses, Ishmael's mind was filled with the image of Pâquerette, not as she appeared to him now, sitting shyly at a corner of the table, half-hidden by the protecting figure of big Lisbeth, but as he had seen her an hour ago in the wood, running after the butterflies, shrieking with delight at the vision of a tawny squirrel flying from branch to branch among the foliage overhead, climbing a grassy bank to pluck wild roses—a creature kindled into new life by the rapturous revelations of a new world. She would go back to the den in the dark old house—to foul odours and foul sights—at nightfall, and it might be long before she saw that heaven of woodland again. It was not his business to provide her with excursions into the country. Indeed, that sensible young woman, Lisbeth Benoît, had been disposed to object to his intervention upon this single occasion. He told himself that Lisbeth was right, and that she would have expressed herself even more strongly had she known all. Raymond Caradec's son did not forget that he was a gentleman. He had cast in his lot among working-men, but it was with a distinct aim and end. He had sunk in order to rise. He knew that in the mechanical arts he had his chance with the best; and he looked forward to the time when he should be a general where he was now only a ranker. He believed in his certainty of a successful career as firmly as the young recruit believes that he carries a marshal's bâton in his knapsack.

'I shall never disgrace my family by a low marriage,' he said to himself. 'It will be time enough to think of a wife when I have made my fortune. Youth will have gone by that

time ; I shall be too old to marry for love,' he reflected, with a sigh ; 'but at least I can marry for honour.'

There was no dancing to-day. The little garden, with its arbours for dining-rooms, was too full of company. There was no music, and perhaps most of the little party had dined too well to be inclined for dancing. The Benoîts and their friends sauntered and lounged in the garden, looking at the other guests, who were all in different stages of dining. When they had exhausted this amusement, the elder members of the party went into the house and looked on at a game of billiards played by a quartette of young soldiers on a very small table, and with a level mediocrity which forbade the pangs of jealousy. An occasional cannon was received with rapture by the whole party as an achievement calculated to reflect lustre upon every one engaged in the game.

The house and garden reeked with odours of dinner and rank tobacco. Ishmael felt that he could endure that stifling atmosphere no longer when there was all the wide world of summer beauty within easy reach. Pâquerette sat among the Benoît girls on a rustic bench in a corner of the garden against a background of scarlet-runners. He would have liked to ask her to go for a ramble with him ; but he told himself that it was better he should go alone. What were Pâquerette and he to each other that he should choose her out of all the rest as his companion ? He snatched up his cap and went out in a hurry as if it needed all his resolution to go alone. The little village had a drowsy look in the afternoon light. A bell was ringing for vespers. Ishmael had meant to go far afield, and only to return in time for the starting of the diligence ; but at the open door of the dark little church he stopped and went in, and knelt in a dusty corner, praying for the repose of his mother's soul—for her release from her sins. And at the end he made a little prayer for Pâquerette, that she might be saved from temptations and dangers, lifted out of the sordid gloom of her miserable surroundings, preserved in the purity and innocence of her childlike nature.

He went no further than the church. When the melodious monotonous sing-song of vesper psalms was over he strolled slowly down to the office from which the diligence was to start.

It was a quiet little inn near the water, and he sat on a low wooden parapet above the stream, smoking his cigar, and idly watching the ripples as they flashed and sparkled under the light of a midsummer moon. Far away above the roadstead of Brest the torches were being lighted, wild figures were flitting to and fro in the twilight, burning brands were being waved in circles, or hurled high in air—a frantic dance as

of demons—and amid the pastoral inland hills and valleys the fires of St. John were being lighted, the shadows of the dead were stealing from the graves to sit beside the friendly blaze and watch the happy dances of youth and hope. Here, except in the church yonder, nobody seemed to care much about St. John. A few tapers burning in a side chapel, a few flowers on an altar, and that was all.

He wondered what his little brothers were doing to-night—if they had gone out with the farm-servants to see the fires, or if they were mewed up in that dreary salon where their mother nursed her everlasting *migraine* while the father brooded over his books, joyless, hopeless, having drained the cup of disappointment to the dregs.

Ishmael sat by the river till the diligence was ready to start, and the rest of the party came hurrying along the road from the village, breathless, excited, full of talk and laughter. When the soldiers had finished their game, Monsieur Dulac and the Benoît girls had made another quartette, the gentlemen giving the ladies their first lesson in billiards. And the game had caused infinite laughter: Madame Dulac, a stout, comfortable-looking young woman, with *accroche-cœurs* on her forehead, pretending to be intensely jealous, and Monsieur Morice, swelling with pride in the consciousness of being a great billiard player *en retraite* while he coached the Benoît girls through the game, showing them at what angle to hold their cues, and stooping down with one eye shut to make a preliminary survey of the balls before every stroke.

While all the others laughed and talked Pâquerette walked silently beside her friend Pauline, hugging her basket. In her ignorance of all rustic life, she had no thought that the woodland sprays and flowers would all be faded to-morrow, that the orange-tawny fungus would lose its beauty and become a thing to be cast upon the dust-heap. She had a dim idea that flowers and leaves would be bright and fair for ever, sweet memorials of this one exquisite day in her young life—a day never to be forgotten, never to be repeated. Such joys could come only once in a lifetime. And yet she had suffered a sense of loss all the evening after Ishmael had left the party—a feeling that the day's delight was over, a vague sadness which she had struggled against, since it were base ingratitude to her friends to be less than utterly happy.

And now as she stood a little aloof from the others, silent, thoughtful, waiting to mount to her place in the diligence, Ishmael came not near her. Why was he so different from what he had been at Vincennes—almost as if he were another person? Nor did he seem the same person who had brought her the

basket a few hours ago. He sat looking across the river, smoking, grave, silent. He did not even glance her way; had forgotten that such a creature lived. Her heart swelled; she felt angry, and then inclined to cry. Why did he treat her so cruelly?

Presently they all began to scramble into the coach. She hoped that he would sit beside her, that he would tell her about his native Brittany—the fairies, the poulpicains, the strange stone monuments, altars of a departed religion. No. For a few moments it would have been quite easy for him to have taken the seat by her side; but he let the occasion slip, and behold, she was screwed into a corner of the *banquette* with the plethoric Morice almost sitting upon her, and two of the Benoît girls between her and Ishmael, who occupied the seat next the driver.

On the railway, where they all sat in an open compartment on the roof of the carriage, whence one had a delightful view of the country—somewhat flavoured and obscured by smoke from the engine, Ishmael's seat was again remote from the corner occupied by Pâquerette. Her eyes were clouded with tears of disappointment and vexation. The landscape had lost all its charms; the very scent of the acacias was hateful. She could see nothing but frivolity and silliness in the delight of the Benoît girls as the train crossed the river by Asnières. The great lamp-lit city yonder, which would have seemed to her a magical thing had she been in her right mind, was only a something strange that had no charm for her.

The party broke up at the terminus. The Morices, the Dulacs, and Ishmael went their way; and the other four, under convoy of big Lisbeth, plunged fearlessly into the dark and narrow streets which in those days lay between the station and the Faubourg St.-Antoine.

The walk was long, and Pâquerette was passing weary by the time they got to the Rue Sombreuil. She found the old people in an unusually amiable temper. The *charabia* had dropped in to supper, and had brought a knuckle of ham in his pocket, and had paid for a *saladier* of red wine *à la Française;* and the entertainment was at its most cheerful stage when Pâquerette came in.

'Well, little Rag, hast thou enjoyed thyself with thy *bourgeois* friends, thy grocers and respectabilities of Ménilmontant?' asked Père Lemoine. 'Hast thou had a pleasant day yonder?'

'I have had a horrid day; I am tired to death,' cried Pâquerette, peevishly.

She threw the basket—Ishmael's gift—into a corner, flung

herself into a clumsy old wooden chair with a ragged rush seat, covered her face with her hands, and burst into tears.

The *trolleur* and his wife looked at each other with a grave significance, half shocked, half amused. The idea of both was that Pâquerette had been given a little too much wine—*elle avait sa pointe, pauvre petite.*

For these two there was only one ruling passion—the love of the bottle. As they looked at Pâquerette, white, tearful, they had no apprehension of that other passion which has its influence upon the minds and ways of men and women, as strong and even more fatal than the craving for strong drink.

The *charabia* had a keener eye for the situation.

'Perhaps her sweetheart has not behaved well,' he said. 'Say, then, little Pâquerette; say, then, my pretty pale flower, hast thou a sweetheart already, and has he begun to play thee false at the very beginning?'

He went across the room and chucked Pâquerette under the chin with his fat forefinger. The very touch seemed pollution.

She sprang to her feet, looked at him with eyes aflame and cheeks white with wrath.

'How dare you!' she cried, then rushed past him, snatched up her basket, and locked herself in her little closet of a bedchamber—the room to which her mother had crept back to die.

'*Quelle diablesse!*' exclaimed the *charabia*, shrugging his broad shoulders, and going quietly back to his seat to renew his attack upon the *saladier.*

## CHAPTER XI

### 'THE CITY IS FULL OF VIOLENCE'

SEBASTIEN CARADEC—otherwise Ishmael—was a man of fixed and steadfast mind. Once having resolved within himself that Pâquerette was no wife for him—that he would bring disgrace and dishonour on his house were he to choose a wife of the *trolleur's* blood—he made it his business to see no more of the pale wild-flower face, the pleading blue eyes with their pathetic look, which had reminded him of a little thing he had read in a magazine, translated from an English writer—the sentimental reverie of a philosophic gentleman upon a caged starling, which fluttered against the bars of its cage, reiterating its piteous cry, 'I can't get out, I can't get out.'

To his fancy, Pâquerette's pathetic eyes had pleaded, just as the starling pleaded, for release from a cruel captivity—the bondage of squalid poverty and vicious surroundings.

He was sorry for her—he admired her—but the divine spark was not kindled in his breast. He was heart-whole and could afford to renounce her. But he did not easily forget her. The vision of her radiant face in the wood, illumined with the rapture of a new happiness, haunted him often. Still, he was steadfast.

Madame Morice invited him to join in two or three more Sunday afternoon pleasure trips before the summer and early autumn were over; but on each occasion he pleaded business, or an engagement of some kind; and so the year wore on, and time and chance brought about no meeting between him and Pâquerette.

He was full of occupation at this period: his life was crowded with interests. His ardour as politician, Republican, reformer had increased with every week of his residence in Paris. He had caught the spirit of the time, which was ardent, eager, expectant of change. The men of the Left were for the most part young men, idealists, impossible-ists, impetuous, daring; and youth among the working-classes was fired by the sparks that flashed from the Republican party in the Senate. The men who make the revolutions of Paris are not always Parisians; indeed, it is a fact to be noted that the men who achieve great things either in politics or commerce

in a metropolis are rarely men born and bred in that metropolis. It is the province—the fresh, free air of mountain and sea—the wide wastes of Gascogne—the moorlands of Berry—the hills of Auvergne—which send their vigorous young blood to do and dare in the capital. Seldom is it from the stones of the city that her soldiers and senators spring.

Ishmael was intense in all things; and, steeped in the ideas of his club, he became before December as ardent a Republican as any of those fiery spirits of the *tiers-état* who helped to make the Revolution of 1789. He had sat at the feet of such teachers as Victor Hugo and Louis Blanc. He had spoken on the side of the people, and he believed in the divine right of the people as against the right of kings.

Going to his work in the chill dawn of the second of December, there was nothing in the air of Belleville or Ménilmontant to tell Sébastien Caradec that a great political convulsion, that a daring cast for Empire, had been begun during the night; that, under the cover of darkness, statesmen and generals, the senators of France, had been surprised in their beds by an armed police, bound, and gagged, and carried out of their homes amidst the shrieking of agonised wives, the tears of scared children—carried off on the first stage of the dismal journey to Mazas, Ham, or Cayenne. And yet this thing had been done.

Last night a little scene, quiet—yet eminently dramatic, by reason of the repose, the reserved force of the chief actors—had been performed in the Palace of the Elysée, in a brilliantly-lighted room, amidst a crowd of guests. Late in the evening, the Prince-President, leaning with his back against the mantelpiece in the large drawing-room, summoned Colonel Vieyra, the chief of the staff, by a little look.

'Colonel, can you command your countenance if I tell you something startling?' he asked quietly.

'I think so, my Prince.'

'Good. *It is for to-night.* Can you assure me that to-morrow morning the drums shall not beat the rappel?'

'Assuredly; if I have a sufficient staff under my orders.'

This instruction was obeyed to the letter. Before morning the parchment of every drum had been split under the eyes of Vieyra.

'See Saint-Arnaud,' said the Prince; 'and at six o'clock to-morrow be at head-quarters. Let no member of the National Guard go out in uniform.'

The President and the Colonel separated after this conversation, which had not attracted any attention.

At the same hour Monsieur de Morny—friend, kinsman,

partisan of the Gallic Cæsar—was flitting from box to box at the Opéra Comique, full of small talk and high spirits—courtier, man-of-the-world, viveur, diplomatist, cynic, a being of mysterious birth, as it were the issue of the Elder Gods—the most fascinating, cleverest, bravest, most dangerous man in France.

'People tell me that the President of the Republic is going to make a clean sweep of the Chamber,' said the wife of one of Louis Philippe's officers, as de Morny bent over her chair during the *entr'acte*. 'What is to become of you?'

'If the broom is to be used, Madame, I hope I shall be on the side of the handle,' answered de Morny, lightly.

Before the latest visitors departed from the Elysée Louis Napoleon had retired to his study, where de Morny, Saint Arnaud, de Maupas, and Mocquard were waiting for him. Mocquard was devoted to the Prince—bound to him by old associations of the tenderest character. Cæsar's secrets could not be in safer hands. Thus it was Mocquard who had prepared the portfolio which contained the papers—list of names, plan of action, and, above all, the sinews of war, in the shape of several millions of francs advanced by the Bank of France—necessary to the successful issue of the drama which was to be begun to-night. Upon this portfolio was inscribed the mystic word, RUBICON.

The second of December, 1851, might be called the day of Protestations. In the High Court of Paris seven judges of the highest jurisdiction sat in solemn assembly and protested against the flagrant violation of the Constitution, and summoned the chief of the State to appear before them, charged with the crime of high treason. But the action of the law is slow, and individually, from the human stand-point of intense hatred of Cavaignac and the Reds, the seven judges were all friendly to Prince Louis Napoleon. The proceedings of the High Court were therefore adjourned until the following day, and this solemn conclave produced only protest number one. Latest example of mountain and mouse.

Protest number two was signed by the members of the State Council.

Protest number three emanated from the journalists of Paris, who could not remain neutral when national interests were at stake. With some difficulty they met at the office of the *Siècle*, and agreed to the terms of their protestation, which was covered with signatures; but when it came to the question of printing this manifesto—the voice of the national press, the interpretation of popular feeling—there were insurmountable difficulties.

The iron hand of Cæsar had barred every printing-office in Paris.

'Why waste powder upon protestations?' cried Emile de Girardin. 'Go and shut up the Bourse. That is the thing to be done.'

Later he had a wider proposition: a universal strike. No tradesman to sell his goods; no artisan to work; stagnation—starvation—the stillness of a city struck with death—till the outraged deputies should be set at liberty and the authority of the violated Chamber restored.

Neither of these ideas was put into action. Bakers will bake and sell their bread; butchers will kill; the beaten round of daily life will go on albeit the Constitution—an abstract noun which has different meanings in the minds of different people—may be trampled under foot.

Ishmael left his work yonder by Belleville and went into the heart of Paris. The Boulevard des Italiens was in those days the forum of the Parisians; and here, on the steps in front of Tortoni's, which served as the tribune, the fever of expectation, doubt, suspicion, was at its height. Yet it was not a violent fever. Paris took the *coup d'état* very lightly.

The middle classes were undecided; the people were doubtful. The Faubourg Saint-Antoine, even—once the very altar of liberty, the cradle of revolution—was as quiet as the grave. A sluggish dulness seemed to have crept over the spirits of the working-classes—a timid acceptance of things as they were—a fear of upsetting a line of statecraft which seemed to be working for the material comfort and prosperity of the artisan. Even the *ebénistes* were indifferent, and had to be lashed and stung into action by the eloquence of Victor Hugo, the earnestness of Schœlcher and Baudin. The disinterested love of liberty, for its own sake, was to be found only among these representatives of the Left—still free to move about among their fellow-men, brandishing the torch of revolution, calling to the very stones of Paris to rise against the tyrant: still free, but already under the ban, and obliged to meet together in secret, afraid to seek the shelter of their own homes.

The brief winter day wore on to its early close. Twice during that day the Prince-President showed himself to the people—as it were between the acts of the drama. He left the Elysée on horseback, accompanied by his marshals—a brilliant cavalcade—and rode as far as the Rue de Rivoli. It has been said that he expected one of those outbursts of enthusiasm from the populace which carry a man to the throne—taken off his feet, as it were, and swept on to the Royal platform by the irresistible flood-tide of public feeling. But there was no such

ovation; and the Prince went back to the Elysée, to show himself again late in the afternoon, when the acclamations were more numerous.

At four o'clock the Republican party—disturbed at their first rendezvous, driven from pillar to post by rumours of the police on their track—met for deliberation in a house on the Quai de Jemmapes. A committee of resistance was named, the eloquent voice, the fiery spirit of which was Victor Hugo; and late that night the same party, swollen by many additional members, met secretly in the workshops of Frédéric Cournet, in the Rue de Popincourt; Victor Hugo in the chair; Baudin, a brave and bold spirit, Hugo's junior by ten years, seated at the master-spirit's side as secretary.

An armed resistance was the sole idea of the assembly.

'Listen,' cried Victor Hugo. 'Bear in mind what you are doing. On one side, a hundred thousand men, batteries, arsenals, cannon, munitions of war sufficient for another Russian campaign. On the other side, a hundred and twenty representatives of the people, a thousand or so of patriots, six hundred muskets. Not a drum to beat the rappel. Not a bell to sound the tocsin. Not a press to print a proclamation. Only here and there a lithographic workshop, a cellar, where a placard may be produced hastily with a brush. Death to any man who takes up a paving-stone in the street; death to all who meet as agitators; death to any man who placards an appeal to arms. If you are arrested during the fight—death; if after the fight—transportation. On one side, the army and a crime; on the other side, a handful of men and the right. These are the odds against us. Do you accept the challenge?'

A unanimous cry responded to the appeal. Yes, against any odds—yes, in the teeth of the tyrant—face to face with death; the men of the Left were ready.

It was midnight when the assembly decided that the Reds should meet to-morrow morning in the Café Roysin, in front of the Marché Lenoir—the representatives of the people in the bosom of the people, in the arms of the artisan class—relying on the courage and the energy of that people to bring to bear an overwhelming force of opposition against the armed might of the usurper.

The Rue Ste.-Marguerite is unique after its kind, and claims distinction as one of the most horrible streets in Paris. It is the chosen abode of the rag-pickers, mendicants, organ-grinders, monkey-men, epileptics, blind, lepers, deaf and dumb, the dealers in tortoiseshell combs and brass watchguards. The Bohemia of a new Court of Miracles has its rendezvous here. Hence, they

sally forth, these jovial beggars of modern Paris, the blind and the lame, the maimed and the dumb, joyous, fresh, hearty, in the early morning, each going to his post, his particular corner on bridge or at church door. Their faces are not yet composed into the professional aspect, the lugubrious droop of the lips is not yet assumed; for here they are still *en famille*, still behind the scenes. The play begins a little later.

In the early morning, while the beggars and *saltimbanques* issue forth to their daily round, the Rue Sainte-Marguerite is alive with the return of the rag-pickers. From all sides—by the Rue de Charonne, by the faubourg, by the Rue de Vaucanson, the Rue Crozatier—they come, drooping under their burdens, preceded by loathsome odours, stumbling and slouching along the muddy pathways, tremulous, staggering, backs aching, eyes dim with the long labours of a night spent in going up and down the streets, stooping a thousand times under the heavy load to explore a heap of foulest refuse. The lanterns swing feebly upon the ends of the long sticks, expiring in a stench of rancid oil. Silently, wearily, the rag-pickers crawl to their dens while the cheery mountebanks jog gaily on to begin a new day.

Heavens, what a street! black, dismal, malodorous; windows whose rotten woodwork has long forgotten the sensation of glass; windows choked with straw, rags, paper—what you will. Mud always, even when the rest of Paris is clean. Mist and dampness always, even when the better parts of Paris are bright and clear. Disease always, in more or less revolting form. Hunger always: never enough to eat, yet always, strange paradox, too much to drink. When it is a question of bread or *trois-six*, the *chiffonnier* prefers his *trois-six*. Can you blame him? Every bone in his body is familiar to him as a sensation of pain. The bread could do him so little good. But the vile spirit burns, and that is something.

The angle formed by the junction of the Rue Sainte-Marguerite and the Rue de la Cotte was the scene of the one heroic act in the history of the *coup d'état*. Here was erected the first barricade. Here Baudin fell.

There was an air of fatality in all the circumstances of that first barricade. There had been the meeting at the Café Roysin. A minority of Victor Hugo's party arrived at the rendezvous at eight o'clock. The majority understood the hour to be from nine to ten. The café was a large building, with high windows and looking-glasses against the wall, the usual marble tables, plenty of seats, several billiard-tables in the middle of the apartment.

The representatives were received with a friendly air. They were soon joined by a number of strangers, all as earnest as

themselves. There were workmen among them, but no blouses. The artisans had been requested to wear coats lest the shopkeepers should take fright at the aspect of the blouse as a badge of revolution. The horrors of '48 were still fresh in the minds of the middle classes, and the workman's blouse was the livery of the Red Spectre, the genius of anarchy and destruction, about which such terrible things had been said and written of late.

Among these men of the Faubourg Saint-Antoine was Ishmael, who had cast in his lot with the Reds. He had come to Paris when the memory of '48 was still fresh in the minds of men, and his young and ardent temper saw the struggle for liberty in its noblest aspect. He read the writings of Hugo and Schœlcher, whose articles in the Republican papers had done much to kindle the fire of enthusiasm in the minds of the people. And now, in the cold, rainy December morning, through the muddy streets, he came to cast in his lot with those gallant spirits who, against overwhelming odds, were to try the question of Liberty versus Despotism. Granted that the despot's rule may have been in the main better for France ; that, from the chaos of divided opinions, it was well that one man should stand forth—daring, enlightened, judicious—and take his place boldly at the helm of the national barque ; still, looking back at those three dark December days, who can doubt that the truer heroism, the purer love of country, was to be found among that handful of men who flung themselves into the arms of the people, and challenged that people to defend their violated rights ?

Unhappily for these heroes of the Left, the artisan class was cold to the voice of patriotism. The representatives of the Right had been disliked and feared, suspected as Royalists, Reactionists; and no one was offended at the idea of their having all been whisked off to prison, plucked out of their beds in the dead of night, turned out of their seats in the Chamber, carted about from pillar to post by their captors like sheep carried to the market. It is difficult to conceive what would be the effect upon English society if the household troops were to swoop down upon the House of Commons and carry a troublesome majority off to the Tower. Yet this sweeping out of the French Chamber by a military force hardly seems to have created surprise or indignation among the populace of Paris. They thought the clearing out of the Senators a good riddance ; and as they were given to understand that it meant the establishment of universal suffrage, the general feeling was at the outset in favour of the Dictator.

While the little knot of Reds were waiting for the rest of their party in front of the Café Roysin, an omnibus came along

at a sharp trot, escorted by a squadron of lancers, and filled with those members of the Chamber who had spent the night miserably, under watch and ward, at the d'Orsay Barracks, and who were now being carried off to Vincennes.

In an instant there arose a cry from the men of the Left: 'They are the representatives of the people! Save them!' There was a dash at the horses' heads, and vigorous hands caught the bridles. The first omnibus was stopped, the door was opened; but the prisoners, instead of alighting, entreated their would-be liberators to let them alone. They would rather go to prison than be so rescued.

A scornful laugh broke from the workmen who had stood by looking on at the attempted rescue; and this exhibition of poltroonery on the part of their senators may have helped to damp their ardour in the brief struggle which followed.

Baudin was a medical man, better known to the workmen of the Faubourg Poissonière than to those of Saint-Antoine—an eloquent speaker, an honest man, the chief voice now in the little knot of Reds waiting the advent of their colleagues. Ishmael had heard him speak on many occasions, and honoured him. He drew near his elbow now, waiting to see what was going to happen, his pulses beating high, ready to help with heart and hand in the work that was to be done. Baudin knew him by sight, and knew him to be a staunch Republican. He gave him a friendly nod as he stood talking to one of his colleagues.

There was an impatience to do something—not to wait for the others. Baudin would fain have waited till their numbers were stronger; but he yielded to the eagerness of Schœlcher and the rest, all on fire for the fray.

Among a hundred and fifty men they were able, by disarming the sentinels at the two nearest guard-houses, to distribute thirty muskets, the soldiers giving their arms with a friendly air to the cry of 'Vive la République!' A cart carrying manure approached the Rue Sainte-Marguerite at the angle where it joins the Rue Cotte. The cart was thrown over, the barricade was begun. A baker's cart followed; then a milkwoman's cart, strong, heavy; finally, an omnibus. The four vehicles placed in line were hardly broad enough to bar the main street of the faubourg. Empty baskets were heaped on the top. The handful of representatives, in their tricoloured scarfs, the handful of their friends, Ishmael among them, took their stand on the barricade just as a boy rushed along the street shouting 'The troops!' and the steady tramp of men, the jingle of arms, was heard drawing nearer and nearer.

Two companies were coming from the Bastille, marshalled

at equal distances, and barring the entire street. Doors and windows were shut precipitately. The critical moment had come.

'Citizens,' said Schœlcher, 'let no shot be fired. When the army and the city fight, it is the blood of the people that is shed on both sides. Let us first address the soldiers.'

'Down with the twenty-five francs!' cried a group of blouses at the corner of the Rue Sainte-Marguerite, alluding scornfully to the salary of the representatives.

Baudin looked at the men steadily from his post on the barricade.

'You shall see how a man can die for twenty-five francs,' he said.

The two columns of soldiers were now in sight of the insurgents, and behind them in the distance gleamed the bayonets of another troop.

Steadily, slowly, the two companies advanced upon the barricade; and then the frightened inhabitants, peering from their closed windows, the lukewarm loungers on the pavement, beheld a noble spectacle.

Seven representatives of the people, with no other defence than their official scarves, came in front of the barricade and approached the soldiers, who waited for them with their muskets pointed, while the rest of the party manned the barricade—Baudin standing upon the overturned omnibus, the upper half of his figure exposed to the attack.

Then followed a dialogue between Schœlcher and an officer in command—resolute, intrepid, on both sides. The Republican deputy urged the majesty of the violated law—called upon the soldier to respect the Constitution. The soldier recognised no law beyond the orders of his superior.

'Gentlemen of the Chamber,' said the Captain, finally, 'retire, or I shall give the command to fire.'

'Fire!' cried one of the seven. Then, as at Fontenoy, the representatives of the people took off their hats and faced the levelled muskets.

'Charge bayonets!' cried the Captain; and there was a movement forward; but the soldiers shrank from wounding these unarmed men as from a double treason, because they were the representatives of the people, and because they were defenceless. Not a blow was struck, not a shot was fired, till, by an unhappy accident, the point of a bayonet hit Schœlcher and tore his scarf. The act was seen from the barricade, and one of the Reds, believing his colleague in danger, fired, and hit the soldier, who fell, shot through the heart. He was a conscript, a lad of eighteen. This fatal shot was the signal for a

volley from the soldiers. They stormed the feeble rampart; Baudin was killed, and the barricade taken.

Let it be noted that the soldiers—they who were to-morrow to riot in a carnival of murder—had, up to this point, acted with singular forbearance. They took no prisoners; the defenders of the barricade were allowed to disperse quietly in the surrounding streets, and to find a friendly refuge in neighbouring houses. So far the army was blameless. But on this morning of the third the men were still sober. The money distributed with such lavish hand among the soldiery had not yet begun to be spent on that liquid fire which, later, transformed veterans and lads alike into madmen, murderers, demons almost as deadly as the copper-faced assassins of Delhi and Cawnpore.

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## CHAPTER XII

### 'DEATH IS COME UP INTO OUR WINDOWS'

ISHMAEL was among the last to leave the scene of that short, sharp struggle. He helped to carry the expiring Baudin to the hospital of Sainte-Marguerite. He was one of those who lifted the body of the young conscript from the muddy, trampled ground in front of the barricade—a slender, boyish figure, buttoned to the chin in the gray military overcoat, one red stain upon the breast showing where the bullet had gone home. This dismal work over, Ishmael loitered about the faubourg, disheartened, stupefied almost by the sight of those two dead faces, one of which, aflame with the fire of patriotism, ennobled by the power of intellect, had been so familiar to him in life. The conflict had but just begun—feebly, hopelessly begun—and already one of the best and bravest of Liberty's champions had fallen!

Not since his mother's death until to-day had Ishmael looked upon the face of the dead. He turned from the hospital door with a strange, dream-like feeling—a sense of hardly belonging to the actual world around him. Those two yonder, calm on their hospital beds, had passed to the other side of the river—the shadowy, mystic, unexplored country on the further bank. And if the conflict between the despot and the people were to continue, who could say how many more must fall as Baudin

had fallen, counting the cost of a life as a feather when weighed against the freedom of a nation?

'What would it matter to any one if I were lying beside Dr. Baudin?' Ishmael asked himself, with a shrug of his broad shoulders. 'My father would perhaps never know my fate, or, if he heard of it, would hardly be sorry. My stepmother would be glad; and my brothers—well, poor little lads, they are young enough to have forgotten me before now. A year is a long time in their little lives. It would be too much to expect to be remembered after such an interval.'

He took a draught of wine at a shop in the Rue de la Roquette, and as he was going out of the door, brushed against an old man whose face was familiar to him, although he did not remember where or when they had met.

The other was keener, and remembered Ishmael perfectly.

'Good day, citizen; grand doings yonder by the gentlemen in scarves,' he said; 'but we want no more barricades; the faubourg has had enough fighting: we want a quiet life, and to be paid fairly for our work, and to take our drop of little-blue in peace.'

Ishmael remembered him now. It was the old trolleur, Pâquerette's grandfather. He had been drinking already, though it was not yet noon, and was in that cheery state which might be described as *bien, poivre, allumé, bon zig.* Ishmael would fain have passed him with briefest greeting, but the old man laid a grimy claw upon his sleeve. 'If you were going to take *un canon de la bouteille*, or to rinse your beak with fine champagne, for example, I'm with you,' he said. 'Let us enjoy ourselves as good comrades.'

Ishmael was obviously leaving the shop, but he was not of a temper to refuse a drink even to this old vagabond.

'I shall drink no more this morning,' he said, 'but I'll pay for whatever you please to order.'

Influenced more by a desire to hear of Pâquerette than from a wish to be civil to the *ebeniste*, Ishmael turned back into the little wine-shop and seated himself at a table opposite Père Lemoine.

The bottle of fine champagne was brought, a bright oily yellow liquid, which sparkled like a gleam of sunshine against the dull, gray winter light. The waiter put a couple of glasses beside the bottle, and Père Lemoine filled both.

'Mine and yours,' he said. 'Don't be frightened. You shall drink in the spirit, and I in the body. A brace of such thimblefuls can harm nobody. So you have had your little barricade yonder, my friend; you have had your finger in the revolutionary pie; and, for the only result, one of the best of

your Reds has been shot; he has drunk a fine soup, poor fellow, and what are any of you the better? Victor Hugo and the rest of them want to rouse the faubourg. They want Saint-Antoine to come to handigrips with that fine gentleman yonder in the Elysée, with his curly moustache and red stripes down his trousers, and his recollections of my uncle. But the faubourg has had enough of barricades. She has shed her blood by hogsheads, poured out her heart's blood as freely as they are pouring that little-blue wine yonder. And what is she the better for the sacrifice of her children? She is master for a day, to be trampled under foot to-morrow. Reaction, reaction—turn out an Orleans, and bring back a Bourbon of the elder branch. Anything rather than that the people should keep the privileges for which they have bled. I shall fight on no more barricades, my friend. I have seen too many of them, and I know how little comes of the fuss and bother. Saint-Antoine is wise by experience. Victor Hugo and his friends may sermonise till they are hoarse, but they won't rouse the faubourg. To your health, Monsieur Ishmael, out of glass number one; and now to my health from Monsieur Ishmael, glass number two;' and the old toper swallowed the contents of both glasses without winking.

'There may be other faubourgs more patriotic,' answered Ishmael; 'there may be those who will avenge the blood of Baudin. But don't let us talk politics. The subject is not the safest; and you must remember that I am a new comer, and have hardly had time to form my opinions.'

'Ah! but you have formed them. I can see it in the resolute cut of your chin—your iron mouth. You are a Baudiniste, a Schœlcheriste, a socialist of the strongest pattern, and you are thirsting for another barricade. Before night you may have your choice of fifty, perhaps. But not in our faubourg: we had enough in '48. Try the centre of Paris, the old streets in the market quarter, the neighbourhood of Saint-Eustache: that is the citadel of the people; a town within a town: there they are impregnable—every alley a trap for their enemies; every house a fortress. That is the true strength of old Paris; that is the cradle of all the great revolutions: the League, the Fronde, the Terror: go there, my friend, if you want barricades.'

'Have no fear. I will go wherever a strong arm is wanted,' answered Ishmael. 'And now tell me about your granddaughter, Mademoiselle Pâquerette. She is well, I hope?'

'She is well. She had need be well. She is on the high road to good fortune. An honest man—a bourgeois, with a shop in this very street, and a snug little nest behind his shop, and a

back-yard to store his goods, such a man as one does not meet every day in the Rue Sombreuil—has asked her to be his wife.'

Ishmael started with a sudden touch of pain. He had never been in love with Pâquerette. He had existed for nearly six months without seeing the pale, snowdrop face, and yet his heart sank within him at the thought that another man was to pluck this pearl out of the gutter, this gem which he had not stooped to gather out of the mire, too careful lest his hands should be soiled in the process. Truly it were hardly a pleasant thing to have this Père Lemoine here, whose unsteady hand was now in the act of pouring out a fourth glass of fine champagne, for one's grandfather-in-law.

'I am glad that Mademoiselle Pâquerette is to have such a good husband,' said Ishmael. 'Pray who is the gentleman?'

'A friend of mine who has done business with me for twenty years; an Auvergnat—a hard-working, frugal creature, who, beginning in the humblest way, has saved enough money to set up as a dealer in furniture and curiosities—a fine trade always—and whose first thought, worthy soul! on beginning life in his own house, was to ask Pâquerette to be his wife.'

'An Auvergnat: your Charabia, I suppose?' exclaimed Ishmael, disgusted. 'Why, that is the man whom Pâquerette abhors; at least, she told me so six months ago.'

'She is a child, and does not know her own mind. She likes him well enough now, I can tell you.'

'But you say he has been doing business for twenty years. He must be forty years of age?'

'Suppose he is forty! What harm is there in forty years, do you think?' cried the trolleur, smacking his lips over the fine champagne, and sending little gusts of fiery breath across the table towards Ishmael. 'A man at forty is in his prime. I am forty, and twenty-seven years on the top of forty, and I am in *my* prime. *Cré nom!* a man of forty is in the very blossom of youth. Bring me no schoolboy bridegrooms for my granddaughter. I want a sensible man, a man who knows how to rule a wife. I married when I was five-and-twenty, and I have been sorry for it ever since. A man should be master from the first.'

'I hope you are not going to sell your granddaughter to this Charabia, as you have sold your furniture,' said Ishmael, gravely.

'My faith! he shall pay me a fair price for her,' said the trolleur, whose illumination was becoming a little more vivid with every fresh glass. 'What is the use of a *torchon* like that if one cannot turn an honest penny by her? She has eaten and drunk at my cost long enough, little *fainéante*. It is time

she got someone else to pay for her *pâté*, and to make a handsome present to her grandfather into the bargain.'

'I am afraid you are forcing this marriage upon Mademoiselle,' said Ishmael, chinking a glass against the bottle as a summons to the waiter, and as a gentle hint that he did not mean to pay for any more brandy.

The waiter came, scrutinised the bottle, which was marked in measured degrees like a thermometer, a downward scale which might be taken as emblematic of the descent of Avernus, and took payment for Père Lemoine's four glasses.

'I force a marriage upon her! Why, the child is as proud as a queen at getting such a husband—a shop in the Rue de la Roquette—two rooms, furnished: why the Tuileries are not better furnished than Jean Baugiste's little salon, all in mahogany, of the Empire style, substantial, splendid; a gilded clock and candelabra on the mantelpiece, a secretaire that belonged to Talleyrand, a room fit for a duchess. Force! do you say? Why, her grandmother and I have spoiled the girl ever since she was a baby. Come and see for yourself if you think we are ill-using her.'

Ishmael hesitated for a moment or so while he mechanically counted the change out of his five-franc piece. After all, Pâquerette's marriage was no business of his. He had made up his mind last midsummer that she was no fitting wife for him. But he remembered how Pâquerette had spoken of the Charabia on that May night when they two had walked from Vincennes; he recalled her shudder as she confessed her hatred of the man, a hatred she feared to avow in her own wretched home. This recollection decided him. He did not want to put himself forward as a suitor for Pâquerette; but if he could save her from an odious marriage, defend her from the tyranny of this drunken scoundrel of a grandfather, he would do it even at some cost to himself.

'I should like to see Mademoiselle, and congratulate her on her marriage,' he said quietly, 'if my visit will not trouble you.'

'Come along then: we are sure to find the little hussy at home. She does nothing all day but roll one thumb round the other, and listen to any organ-grinder who comes our way.'

The trolleur sauntered along the street by Ishmael's side with the easy rolling walk of a man who has spent half his life in sauntering idleness, always more or less *allumé*. He seemed to know almost every one he passed, and saluted his acquaintances with a friendly nod. Most of the shops were closed, and there were a good many people in the streets; but the faubourg had a quiet air, almost a Sabbath-day tranquillity.

'Saint-Antoine sleeps,' said Père Lemoine.

Presently, at a street corner, he stopped to look at the freshest placard on the dead wall of an old uninhabited house. It was the latest manifesto from the Elysée, the printer's ink still wet.

'INHABITANTS OF PARIS,—

'The enemies of order have engaged in a struggle. It is not against the Government or the elect of the people that they fight; their purpose is pillage and destruction. Let all good citizens unite for the preservation of order and of their menaced homes. Be calm, inhabitants of Paris; let no curious idlers block the streets; they interfere with the movements of those brave soldiers who desire to protect you with their bayonets.

'For me, you will find me unshaken in my determination to defend and maintain order.'

'So much for the Prince,' said the trolleur; 'but here's a postscript from the General.'

'The Minister of War, in accordance with the law during a state of siege, decrees—

'That every person taken in the act of constructing or defending a barricade, or carrying arms, shall be shot.

'DE SAINT-ARNAUD, Minister of War.'

'It is not child's play, you see, my friend, this barricade-making for which you are so eager,' said the trolleur, grinning as, with tremulous hand, he plucked the wet placard off the wall and flung it into the gutter.

Below the President's manifesto there was a placard issued by the Reds, a shabby lithographed placard—since there was not a printing press in Paris at the disposal of the people in these first days of December—a poor little placard stuck on the wall with four red wafers.

'TO THE PEOPLE.

'Art 3. The Constitution is confided to the guardianship of every patriotic Frenchman.

'Louis Napoleon is an outlaw.

'The state of siege is abolished.

'Universal suffrage is re-established.

'Vive la République!

'To Arms!

'For the united Mountain,

'Signed, VICTOR HUGO.'

'Spuffle!' exclaimed the trolleur: 'Louis Bonaparte has the Army. Unless the National Guard unite with the people, he will have things his own way. It is not worth while arguing

nice points of the Constitution with a disputant who has a hundred thousand soldiers at his back.'

He plucked off the patriots' appeal as scornfully as he had torn away the President's manifesto, and flung the crumpled paper after the other. Then, in sheer wantonness, while he contemptuously discussed the President and his surroundings, the trolleur peeled at least half-a-dozen weather-beaten and mud-stained placards from the wall—playbills, shopkeepers' advertisements—till he came to an old and scarcely legible placard.

'See,' he cried, pointing to the wall. 'Behold a spectre from the past! It is the speech Louis Bonaparte made when he was elected President.'

The only words remaining in a readable condition were the following, which the trolleur read aloud in his husky, brandy-drinker's voice:

'The suffrages of the nation and the oath which I have just taken command my future conduct. My duty is marked out for me. I shall fulfil that duty as a man of honour.

'I shall recognise the enemies of my country in all those who may endeavour by unlawful means to change the Constitution, which has been established by the whole of France.'

'When Cæsar made that speech he was on the other side of the Rubicon,' said Ishmael; and just at this moment a man in plain clothes, who looked like a member of the police, shouldered the trolleur aside, and tore down the placard, and all other old placards on the wall.

Ishmael and his companion walked on to the Rue Sombreuil. The gloomy old courtyard looked more like a stone well than ever on this dark and cheerless winter afternoon. The rain and the trampling to and fro of many feet had made the stony pavement muddy and sloppy. Rank odours of sewage, soup, and fricot pervaded house and yard.

The trolleur marched straight into his den, followed by Ishmael.

Pâquerette was sitting on a three-legged wooden stool by the fire, plucking a cabbage for the family pot-au-feu. She was much smarter than of old. She wore a bright blue stuff gown, and a coral necklace and earrings; but the small delicate face had less colour than ever, and when she started up from her low seat at the entrance of Ishmael, the poor little face looked ghastly white above the red necklace and blue gown.

'Here's a surprise for you, my cabbage,' cried the trolleur. 'Mademoiselle Benoît's friend has come to see you!'

Ishmael went across the room and offered Pâquerette his hand. Her slender fingers were cold as ice, and trembled in his clasp.

'Your grandfather tells me that you are soon to be married, Mademoiselle,' he said. 'I hope it is going to be a happy marriage.'

The girl looked first at him, and then at her grandfather, with an indescribable expression, which might mean fear, grief, shyness, anything.

'Grandfather says so,' she faltered, after a long pause, looking at the ground.

'And I hope your husband that is to be is a good man.'

'Grandfather says he is,' she murmured, her eyes still on the ground.

'And grandfather knows the world, my little cat,' said the trolleur, with an exaggerated air of cheery benevolence. 'Grandfather will not marry thee to a rogue, be sure of that. An Auvergnat, a true son of the mountain, simple, hardy, honest, a man who has prospered by patient industry, by temperance—oh, it is a beautiful thing, temperance—self-denial, perseverance, and who deserves to enjoy his prosperity with a pretty young wife to keep him company. How can a girl hope for a better husband than that? If he had been made expressly for her, he could not be more suitable. And how he adores her! why, the very ground she walks upon is sacred in his eyes. And how generous too. Look at her new gown—his gift; her earrings, her necklace—his gifts. Not an evening passes that he does not bring us something nice for supper. Such *rigolades* as we have every night!'

The girl said not a word, made no protest against her grandfather's fine talk. She was content to wear the Charabia's gifts; and doubtless she was prepared to accept him as a husband.

The grandmother came in from market, bringing a piece of beef for the *pot-au-feu*, while Ishmael lingered. She, too, was in excellent spirits. She had loitered in the streets to hear what was said about this *petit bout de révolte*. She had gone as far as the Morgue with the crowd who accompanied the slain conscript in his journey from the hospital to the dead-house. '*Pauvre Piou-piou*,' she said, wiping away a tear. Monsieur Baudin was to remain at the hospital till his friends came to fetch him. She had been told that he made a beautiful corpse, calm as one who slept.

Ishmael turned from her with a feeling of disgust. Was this the mighty heart of Saint-Antoine? Was this all that was left of the burning patriotism of '48?—this spirit of idle curiosity, of gossip, of indifference to all the loftier aspects of a great national struggle, the everlasting conflict of might against right.

He was still more disheartened and disgusted by his brief interview with Pâquerette. The girl looked weak and foolish,

a creature born to be a slave, fit for nothing better than to be sold to the highest bidder. That coral necklace reminded him of a halter. He had seen a young heifer in the market-place at Dol with just that meek, foolish air, waiting for the butcher who was to buy her.

Ishmael went from the Faubourg Saint-Antoine to the neighbourhood of the markets, under the shadow of that mighty sixteenth-century church, which stands where once rose the Temple of Cybèle. Here he found more excitement, more emotion than in the region of the Bastille. Barricades, or sketches of barricades, were being raised in several streets; but there was a want of animation and a want of unanimity. The artist classes, the thinkers, the dreamers, were roused and ready for action; but the masses had not caught fire. There were leading spirits among the workmen's clubs who were as enthusiastic and as eager for the struggle as the senators of the Left, with Victor Hugo at their head; but the ruck, the thousands whose strong arms might have stemmed the bloody tide of the *coup d'état*, hung back. The mighty voice of the multitude was silent. The working-men of Paris, grown prudent with prosperity, shrank from the risk of the conflict, and left their interests, rights, liberties, independence, to be fought for and bled for by a handful of patriots.

Late into the night of December the third those patriots were assembled in a house in the Rue Richelieu. Ishmael and two or three other workmen guarded the door of their council room, ready to die in defence of those faithful tribunes of the people. On the Boulevards, at the Bourse, among the loungers and saunterers in broadcloth and fine linen, the *coup d'état* was taken lightly enough on this third day of December. The Assembly had been somewhat roughly dissolved; but who cared for the fate of an Assembly which was eminently unpopular? There is a large class in Paris which regards politics as a kind of joke—a subject for calembours and epigrams: a very large class, who would as soon serve Peter as Paul provided trade be brisk and the favourite theatre subsidized, the chosen haunts of the gandin and the lorette maintained in all their agreeableness at the public cost. The desire of the Parisian multitude is for *panem et circenses:* and why fight and die on barricades in defence of an abstraction which dreamers and Socialists rave about by the name of Liberty, and which never yet put a good coat on a man's back, or a piece of beef in his pot-au-feu.

In such a temper as this rose the majority of the Parisians on the morning of the fourth, after a long winter night, which had been not without its anxieties at the Elysée, where the lights in the President's study, the shadows of intent and eager

figures flitting across the blind, told of discussions, disputes, uncertainties; and where it has been said that travelling carriages and horses waited in the stable-yard, ready at a minute's notice to whisk the Prince and his friends out of Paris on the first stage of the long flat road to the Belgian frontier.

The fourth of December began quietly enough everywhere, with a disheartening quietude for the chiefs of the Mountain, weary with futile wavings of the torch of Liberty, beginning to despair of their fellow-man as a feeble hound which, perhaps, after all, has an instinctive preference for the leash—a liking for being fed, and legislated for, and watched and tended by a paternal government as supinely submissive to authority as a child in a mother's lap.

Before noon there were a good many barricades in that network of streets around Saint-Eustache. In the Rue Montorgueil, the Rue du Petit-Carreau, the Rue du Cadran, and in other streets of the same quarter, the paving-stones had been plucked up and built into barricades, mixed with empty barrels, beams taken from houses in the progress of demolition; great alterations were going on in this quarter, which was a place of change and confusion just now. The roadway yawned with pitfalls—hollows from which the stones had been dug out. There had been a good deal of rain, and in many places the streets were knee-deep in mud and slush. There had been fighting on the barricades, but not much before afternoon; there had been some deaths, but not many. The soldiers were picketed under the shadow of Saint-Eustache.

On the Boulevards all was calm. The idle classes had come out to see the fun: husbands and wives, fathers and sons; family groups looking on at what seemed to be a little puff of revolutionary fire, a faint stirring of deep waters; nothing to cause terror.

Towards three o'clock a change came over the scene. From end to end the Boulevards were choked with soldiers; line regiments, gendarmerie, brigades, cavalry; a battery of four guns pointing shot and shell against the barricade in the Rue Saint-Denis, which had been valiantly defended all day. The long, broad avenue—the lounging place, the forum of Paris—was crowded with armed men—armed men evidently considerably the worse for strong drink—a fact which furnished no little amusement to the Parisians who were walking up and down the muddy pavements enjoying the bustle and movement of the scene, or looking down from the balconies at the crowd below.

Suddenly (the soldiers all in marching order facing the gate of Saint-Denis) a single shot was fired: 'from the roof of a

house in the Rue du Sentier,' said some ; 'from a soldier in the middle of one of the battalions, who fired in the air,' said others ; and in an instant, as at an expected signal, the troops changed front, and then burst from the head of the column a running fire, which extended through the ranks and flashed along the boulevard like an arrow of flame. Men, women, and children fled, or flung themselves flat upon the ground before that hail-storm of bullets. Windows, shutters were closed in the wildest haste. But the harvest of dead and dying was not the less rich. A child playing by a fountain—an old man of eighty—a woman with an infant in her arms, clasped close against her breast even in death ; the old, the middle-aged, the young ; the harmless, inoffensive population : here a bookseller on the threshold of his shop, there the *marchand de coco*, with his shining tin fountain. Gray hairs, childhood, womanhood—none were exempt from the slaughter. Those who escaped the bullet were sabred as they fell helpless at the feet of their murderers. Nothing less than the madness of strong drink could account for the ferocity of the soldiers during that hideous quarter of an hour when, in the open street, under the light of day, the horrors of St. Bartholomew's Eve were repeated before the eyes of an astonished populace, every member of which might be one moment a spectator and in the next a victim of the attack.

Dismal spectacle when there came a lull in the fusillade, and the inhabitants of the Boulevards and the adjoining streets crept out of their doors to gather up the wounded and the dying, whom none had hitherto dared to succour. The *marchand de coco* was lying in a corner by the wall, his white apron over his face, his glittering fountain on the ground beside him. He had come out hoping to do a brisk trade among the idlers on the boulevard, and the harvest he had gathered was death. Not far off lay an old man grasping an umbrella, his only defensive weapon ; and a little way farther a young flâneur, with his scarcely-extinguished cigar between his lips, seemed still to smile with the half-amused expression of the fashionable pessimist, for whom all the gravest questions in life have their farcical aspect.

Not far from the spot where lay youth, hope, birth, education, dressed in broadcloth, and come suddenly to a dead stop like a watch whose wheels have run down, there lay—rolled in the gutter, blood-stained, mud-stained, with glassy eyes gazing up at the darkening winter sky, in the fixed stare of death—age poverty, disrepute, intemperance, idleness, vagabondage, all personified in Père Lemoine, the trolleur, who had wandered far afield this December afternoon in quest of excitement, curious to see what was going on upon the Boulevards, and full

of unholy gaiety—pleased to mix in a row, fearing no evil to himself from civilian or soldier, safe in his insignificance, looking on with his half-drunken, cynical air, caring neither for Peter nor Paul. And in this idle humour, without a moment's warning, with the first flash of arrowy flame from the muskets of the front rank, death had surprised him. Struck down by that leaden rain like an ear of corn laid in a hailstorm, he fell and rolled over and over into the gutter. There was no one to see him fall. He was carried off to the Morgue with a large batch of other corpses some hours later, there to await the attention of his friends.

Those on the barricades yonder, under the shadow of Saint-Eustache, were not slow to hear of the carnage. They had heard the fusillade, and took it at first for a triumphant salvo at the capitulation of the great barricade by Saint-Denis; but there was a perpetual going and coming of patriots, and the particulars of the massacre were soon known in the neighbourhood of the markets. The barricades were numerous enough to make this central point a kind of citadel. Barricades in the Rue du Cadran, a barricade at each end of the Rue du Petit-Carreau, five in the Rue Montorgueil. Here and there an ambulance in an uninhabited house, or an empty cellar—an ambulance consisting of two or three straw mattresses, an old woman as nurse and surgeon, and a child to make *charpie*.

The loftiest and strongest of these barricades of the Rue Montorgueil was well manned by about forty Reds, mostly of the professional classes, some who dug up the paving stones and helped in the construction of the barricade with gloved hands. There were only a few workmen among them, and those were the *élite* of the working class. It was here that Ishmael had cast in his lot after fighting gallantly in the Faubourg Saint-Martin all the morning. It was he whose quick eye had seen the advantages of this position, guarded as it was by two other barricades, which made it a kind of citadel. His powerful arms had done good service within the last hour, digging up paving stones, carrying huge beams from a house in process of demolition hard by, rolling empty hogsheads from a cooper's yard near to be filled with stones for the base of the fortification. The barricade had a formidable look as it loomed, huge in the dusk of evening, across the narrow street.

They were joined presently by some fugitives from the boulevard, maddened by the massacre, wild for revenge. These told the story of the slaughter. One of them, who lived hard by, ran back to his house, and returned with a tin barrel full of cartridges.

Darkness closed round them while they were still at work.

They had told off twenty of their force, now swollen to a round fifty, for outpost duty. The soldiers were close at hand. A gleaming red light, shining now and again above the crowded roofs towards the markets, showed where the troops were holding their bivouac, drunk with blood and brandy. Sometimes the hoarse shout of a drinking song—the wild laughter of that armed multitude, came in a brief gust of sound across the housetops. They were merry yonder after the carnage. The bivouac had become an orgy.

There was method in this madness, though, which the faithful souls on the barricades knew not—a deadly method. The men were drunk, but their commanders were still sober and clear-headed ; and the troops were being drawn into a circle round that citadel of revolution, a belt of iron and fire.

Deep darkness fell over the city like a pall—the darkness of a December night, moonless, starless, the atmosphere thick with rain. Every lamp was broken in this quarter of Paris, the gas-pipes were cut, not a shop was open except a couple of wine-shops at which the insurgents refreshed themselves now and then with a draught of water just reddened with thin wine. While the arm of authority was maddened with drink revolt kept sober.

Presently, through the darkness and mud and slush, a man approached the barricade. He was a well-known member of the Assembly, a staunch Republican. With his tri-coloured scarf showing even in the darkness, he offered himself to the men on the barricade as their captain, the representative of the rights of the people, and he was welcomed with a cry of 'Vive la République.'

Ishmael stood next him on the barricade, waiting for the attack.

They waited for more than an hour. Again and again they saw the flare of the watch-fires red above the housetops ; again and again they heard the roar of the bivouac. They sat down upon the stones and waited, listening, expectant. On the right, on the left, behind them, in front of them, on every side at once, a hoarse, dull sound, growing with every moment more distinct and sonorous, came towards them through the darkness of night. It was the march of battalions, the sound of trumpets in the surrounding streets.

They heard, yet, for the most part, were of opinion that there would be no attack till next morning. Night combats are rare in street warfare. They are of all conflicts the most hazardous. But the more experienced of the insurgents saw unmistakable signs of an immediate assault.

At half-past ten there came the sound of movement in the direction of the markets. The troops were on the move. Then

came the clamour of voices, the sound of file-firing ; then silence ; and then, again, the fusillade, the roar of voices and clash of arms. One by one the barricades yonder were being taken.

Between Ishmael's barricade and the troops there was a double barricade in the Rue Mauconseil, a veritable redoubt, poorly but bravely manned. Here the fight was brief but desperate. The insurgents husbanded their ammunition, fired with deliberate aim through the crevices of the stone-work, and decimated their foes. But the conflict was only a question of minutes ; the few succumbed to the many, and the soldiers, maddened by the loss of their comrades and the desperate resistance of the foe, leapt upon the barricade, sabring and shooting right and left of them, trampling the corpses under foot.

And now the troops were in front of Ishmael's barricade, the last point of resistance, the strongest and best manned. The combat began—ruthless, devilish on the part of the State : desperate, despairing on the part of the Republic. The odds against the Reds were overwhelming. Four companies poured from the surrounding streets and from the vanquished barricades, concentrating their strength upon this ultimate struggle. In a serried mass, terrible, invincible, they rolled onward like a living flood and flung themselves against the barricade.

It was horrible. They fought hand to hand, four hundred against fifty. They seized each other by the throat, by the hair. Not a cartridge was left on the barricade ; but there was still the strength of despair. A workman, pierced through the body, plucked the bayonet from his side and slew a soldier with the bloody point. The street was hidden in the smoke of the guns. In the thick darkness, in the stifling stench of gunpowder, the foes flung themselves against each other, and fought like demons in the pit of hell.

The barricade hardly held two minutes ; the insurgents fell on every side. Ishmael, wounded on the forehead, blinded with the blood that streamed into his eyes, found himself flung against the side of a house at the edge of the barricade. Stunned, dazed for a moment or two, he leant against the brick wall, his head swimming, his senses leaving him, hearing oaths, groans, gunshots, dimly as in a dream.

Suddenly something hit him sharply on the head ; a loud whisper from above said, 'Climb up here—your only chance of escape.'

The barricade was taken ; the troops were slaughtering right and left ; faint voices of dying men gasped, 'Vive la République.'

'No prisoners !' cried the general in command ; in other words, no quarter.

The thing which had struck Ishmael was the knotted end of a rope.

'Climb, fool!' whispered the voice above.

He slipped his arm through the noose mechanically, and in the thick darkness began to scale the wall. He was faint from loss of blood; exhausted by the day's fighting; worn out with sleepless nights; but his old boyish habits made the scaling of the wall an easy matter. He climbed from window-ledge to window-ledge while the bullets rained round him, one grazing his leg as he mounted. On the second story there was a glimmer of light behind a half-closed shutter; the shutter opened a little wider as he neared the point. An arm was stretched out, a hand caught hold of his coat, and giddy, half-unconscious, he flung himself through the open window, and fell fainting on the floor.

'One life gained from the carnage!' said a voice above him; 'I have done a better night's work than if I had been on the barricade.'

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## CHAPTER XIII

### 'THE BREAKER HAS COME UP BEFORE THEM'

WHEN Ishmael came to his right mind the *coup d'état* was an accomplished fact. Prince Louis Napoleon was master of Paris and the Parisians, and, with that central force which explodes or holds together the orb of the nation, he was also master of France. The storm was over. The State prisoners, cramped in their narrow cells, fed on black bread and greasy soup—generals, journalists, deputies of all colours and classes, treated with all the ignominy which is the common lot of the commonest felons, huddled and hustled into prison vans, and carried off to the Havre station on the first stage to Cayenne—and those other generals eating their hearts out at Ham—these may have felt the inconveniences and discomforts which attend a sudden and dramatic change, a too rapid swinging round of the State vessel; but Paris in general awoke with a smile, and sunned itself in the balmy atmosphere of halcyon days, the calm which follows storm.

Dark and terrible stories have been written of bloody reprisals which followed that brief revolt of unarmed patriotism

against armed power, of the few against the thousands—stories written by the stainless hand of poet and patriot—stories of wholesale massacres in the dead of the night, of hundreds shot down like sheep, of gutters running blood. Many and many a night the Parisians on the boulevard, dancing, dining, happy and secure in the curtained warmth of peaceful homes, heard the roll of the prison vans in the street below; but as the newspapers had formally announced that no more felons would be sent to the galleys, and that transportation would be henceforth the sole punishment for crime, that dismal sound of the heavy van-wheels thundering over the asphalte made very little impression.

'Another gang of felons going to Cayenne!' said Society, with a careless shrug.

One shudders to read those awful histories; one shrinks from looking down into that dark gulf.

To those who have been happy in Paris under that paternal Government—who have seen the brightness of her peaceful streets, the prosperity of her population, her nobly-organised charities, her sagacious forethought for the welfare of her obscurest citizens, her foul places cleared away, her palaces girdled with parks and gardens, her talents encouraged, her greatness of past or present interwoven as an ever-living memory in the names of her streets, and squares, and fountains, and gateways; to those who have loved Imperial Paris in the days of their youth, who recall the countenance of her Emperor almost as the face of a friend, the loveliness of her Empress as a part of the poetry of life—to such as these it is an acute pain to look back upon those dark days of December, and to acknowledge that, behind all the brightness and the beauty, the wisdom, the benevolence, the real honest love of mankind, there is this one dark ineffaceable blot.

It was the evening of the fifth when Ishmael, who had been delirious all night and all day from the effects of a severe sabre wound upon his head, emerged from a world of hideous shadows, and recovered a dim consciousness of the realities around him.

He was lying on a bed in an alcove, an old-fashioned bedstead, shaped like a sarcophagus, all rosewood and tarnished gilding, after the style of the First Empire. The room was low, but of a tolerable size, with two casement windows. Near the stove under the chimney-piece stood a round table, and on the table a reading lamp. The table was covered with a confusion of papers, books, pamphlets, all heaped upon one another pell-mell; and an open secretaire against the wall was chokeful of the same litter; manuscripts, books in yellow-paper covers, books

in smart bindings, books in shabby bindings, stuffed in anyhow—one on the top of the other, sideways, longways, endways; a row of pigeon-holes gorged with papers in the background. Half buried in a deep *bergère* beside the table—an armchair almost as big as a bedstead—lolled a young man, delicate of feature, and, although not actually handsome, having a certain air of elegance, a distinction and a grace which had more than the charm of beauty. His dress was to the last degree Bohemian; loose duck trousers, a shabby brown velveteen shooting coat, a pair of red morocco slippers trodden down at the heel, a Byron collar, and no necktie. He was of about the middle height, slim, fair, with light brown hair and moustache, and large dreamy blue eyes—eyes which reminded Ishmael of other eyes, those large pensive blue eyes of Pâquerette's, looking at him the day before yesterday with a vague piteousness as of a little child in distress.

Ishmael looked round the room wonderingly, noting every object, until his gaze finally fixed itself on the young man in the armchair, lolling luxuriously with feet as high as his head, lazily puffing a German pipe and staring up at the ceiling.

'Where am I? and how did I come here?' faltered Ishmael, after a prolonged scrutiny. He was so weak, that it cost him some effort to shape these two questions.

'You came here hanging on to a rope through one of those windows,' answered his host, quietly. 'You came here from the jaws of death, for hardly half-a-dozen of the men who fought on that last barricade survived the struggle. Three of them were finished off by the soldiers in the Passage Saumon, shot down like dogs after they had climbed the iron gates for sanctuary. That was *un peu raide*. As for your whereabouts, you are on a second floor in the Rue Montorgueil, the guest of Hector de Valnois, journalist, farce-writer, poet, philosopher, Socialist, but not much, metaphysician, profound thinker, critic most of all; and you are welcome to remain here till you have a sound skull, and can leave the premises without fear of the police, or of the soldiers, who have had orders to search the houses in the Insurgent quarters and to shoot any individual who cannot show that he is an inhabitant of the house in which they find him. Any man found carrying arms is to be shot. I have been expecting a visit from those gentlemen at any moment for the last three-and-twenty hours; but, as they have not come yet, I fancy you have given them the slip, and that in the pitch-darkness of last night nobody saw your wonderful ascent at a rope's end. Happily for you, I have the reputation of being an *Aristo*, and detesting everything Republican; so my apartment is a pretty secure sanctuary. And now take a pull

at this Medoc, and when you feel equal to the exertion, you can tell me who you are.'

He half filled a tumbler with wine and handed it to Ishmael, who drank it eagerly, his lips and throat parched with fever.

'The barricade was taken!' he gasped: 'yes, I know that. And those brave fellows were all slaughtered; but was that the end? is the struggle over? is there no one more to fight for the rights of the people—the Charter, the Constitution?'

'The Constitution, bah!' exclaimed Valnois, contemptuously; 'what is the Constitution worth that a man should shed his blood for it—or any other abstract noun of the same kind—liberty—equality—fraternity—rights of the people? No, my friend, such things never were worth such carnage as this street saw yesterday—brothers shedding brothers' blood. But it is all over. The men of the Mountain are fugitives or prisoners, Paris has returned to her accustomed tranquillity, the troops have gone back to their barracks, and Louis Bonaparte is master of the situation. He has made a clean sweep of a particularly unpopular Assembly, and he holds the destinies of France in the hollow of his hand. He has abolished the obnoxious law of May, which deprived two-thirds of the people of their right to vote by requiring that every voter should have been domiciled for three years in his Commune. He has restored universal suffrage under the fascinating form of the plebiscite, by which the people of France are to vote Yes or No, whether they will or will not have him for their sole and uncontrolled master during the next ten years. But, as every vote will be recorded, the malcontents had better reckon the odds against them before they vote on the wrong side. The man who says No may be a marked man in the days to come.'

'You will not submit to the rule of a usurper? to power snatched from an unwilling people at the point of a sword?'

'My dear fellow, I am one of that vast majority of Frenchmen who would as soon serve Peter as Paul. And for the unwillingness—why, the struggle of the last two days must have shown you that the President's clutch at the sceptre was not nearly such an unpopular move as you handful of Reds think. Paris wants to be governed peaceably, and would rather be ruled by one long-headed man with a lot of deuced knowing fellows about him than by an Assembly of conceited idiots all pulling different ways. And now, my good friend, I'll give you a fresh bandage for your head; and if you feel equal to the exertion, you can tell me all about yourself while I'm putting it on. A medical friend of mine was in here this morning, and got me a lotion for your wound, which he says will heal quickly

on account of your superb *physique*. It would have been a very different matter if any one had cut open my head, he told me. Constitution feeble, habits dissipated: that is my *renseignement*.'

'You are very good,' murmured Ishmael, while Valnois was removing the old bandage and adjusting the new one with fingers as light and delicate as those of a woman; 'you have saved my life—saved me from being cut to pieces by those hell-hounds of drunken soldiers; and although I am hardly strong enough to thank you properly, I am not the less grateful. I am a workman, a mason.'

'A workman! Come, that won't do,' said Valnois. 'You wore a blouse by way of disguise; you were on the side of the blouses, and the costume was convenient.'

'I have told you the plain truth. I have been earning my bread in Paris for more than a year. I began as a *gâcheur*, and I am now a *limousinant*, and can earn from thirty to forty francs a week. I look forward to the time when I may be able to set up as a master-builder in a humble way, perhaps to buy an odd bit of land here or there beyond the exterior boulevards, and to build a few houses for men of my own class, houses that shall be a good deal better than the dens that most of them herd and hugger-mugger in now.'

'I see you are ambitious,' said Valnois, throwing away the end of his cigar and looking at the face on the pillow with a half-serious, half-humorous expression; 'and you are saving money—saving money from the profits of your own labour. Let me have a good look at you, my friend; let me see what kind of an animal it is which works every day in the week and saves a part of every week's wages. I have read of the species in Eugène Sue, but I never quite believed in such a type—out of a Socialist's novel.'

'Why should not a workman have his dreams as well as a poet?' asked Ishmael.

'Ah, why not, indeed! If his dreams reach no better fulfilment than the dreams of the poet, heaven help him. I am a poet, I who speak to you, and I have had my dream, which has landed me in the gutter. What is your name, friend?'

'Ishmael.'

'Ishmael! *tout court*. *Quel drôle de nom!* I see—*sobriquet* of hazard, or of your own choosing. Ishmael! no surname, only Ishmael, which makes me all the more certain of what I saw from the first, that you are a gentleman, and not a workman.'

'I am a journeyman mason, as you may find out for yourself any day if you take the trouble to inquire about me at

Belleville, or Ménilmontant. But I am so much your debtor, that I should have no reserve with you, and I am quite ready to tell you my history if you care to hear it.'

'I am full of curiosity. I have one of those little minds which feed upon trifles, and I am particularly interested in you because you represent the one Christian-like act of my existence. I never played the good Samaritan before last night.'

'And yet the part sits upon you as easily as if it were in your very nature,' said Ishmael; and then, in briefest, simplest phrases, he told his new friend the story of his life from the time of his father's second marriage.

Of his mother's dark fate, or his own childish life in Paris, he said not a word.

'Upon my soul, you are about the only wise man of my acquaintance,' exclaimed Hector de Valnois, who had listened with unfaltering attention to every word of Ishmael's story. 'Any other young fellow in your position would have come to Paris with the idea of earning his living in *gris-perle* gloves, would have tried first to be a poet, then a novelist, then a playwright, then a pamphleteer, then a tutor in a day-school, then, perhaps, a drudge at an office where they copy plays—deepest sink of poverty and degradation—a place where shirtless wretches in ragged coats herd together in some foul den, like dogs in a kennel, in the hope that, by being on the premises day and night, they may get the first chance of any work that has to be done against time. For the man who wants to wear kid gloves and lounge on the boulevard, and who thinks he can earn his bread *en passant*, there is a gradual inevitable downhill road, every stage of which I have trodden. Yes, my friend, I have sounded the bottom of this gulf of Paris; but, happily, I had elasticity enough to surge up again on the wave of fortune. Heaven knows how long I may remain on the breast of the waters. There are men who, when once they sink, never rise again—men who one day leave off wearing linen and trying to live honestly, and who from that hour gravitate towards the galleys, or the guillotine.'

'Perhaps, if I had had a little more book-learning, I might have tried to earn my bread in a manner more becoming my race,' answered Ishmael; 'but as I was much cleverer with my hands than with my head, I made up my mind that my hands would have to keep me; and so far they have earned enough for my wants.'

And enough for you to save money; wonderful man!' said Valnois, lazily puffing at his pipe, and smiling with a superior air upon his new friend.

He wondered at the force of character, the dogged perse-

verance, the temperance and prudence of a man who could work six days a week at a laborious trade, and put by half his earnings.

Yet it seemed to him a lower order of intellect, an inferior kind of clay which could do these things. Poets, wits, geniuses, are made in a different mould. For them these sordid details, these petty daily sacrifices are impossible.

'What should I do with six francs a day?' asked Ishmael, simply. 'I care very little what I eat, and so far I have been able to live without drinking as many of my fellow-workmen drink. My lodging costs me less than half a franc a day. I used to give more than that for a dirty *garni*, but now I have my own furniture, and a clean airy room for three francs a week. I can live upon a franc a day, and the rest is left for books, clothes, and a trifle every week to put in the savings bank.'

'Miraculous! And I got fifteen hundred francs six weeks ago for my share in a vaudeville at the Palais Royal. *Comment on fait la noce.* And I have only one louis and a handful of silver left this evening.'

Ishmael stayed three days and nights in the Rue Montorgueil, long enough to make him very intimate with a young man of Hector de Valnois' frank, easy temper. De Valnois had that half-boyish, half *petit-maître* vanity which is prouder of small vices than other men are of great virtues. He was the true type of Parisian *boulvardier*, dandy, Bohemian, very indifferent as to the company he kept, but very particular as to the cut of his coat, the colour and quality of his gloves. He could go without a dinner, he could sink now and again to the obscurity of a cheap restaurant on the left bank of the Seine; but at Philippe's, or the Maison-Dorée, Véfours, or the Trois Frères, there was no guest more critical or more imperious. His habits were desultory. He worked while other men slept, and slept while all the world was at work. He abandoned himself to long intervals of absolute idleness, which he called his periods of incubation. And then, when the purse was empty, and hunger—absolute, uncompromising hunger—began to pinch the poet's inside, he would take out a quire of paper and write for twenty hours at a stretch, like a maniac, producing something which varied extraordinarily in quality and style—a one-act farce, an article for the 'Revue des Deux Mondes,' a *feuilleton* for the 'Figaro,' criticism, verse, sentiment, satire—but something which was generally worth money, and which he immediately exchanged for that prime necessity of life. Of course, publishers and managers profited by his folly, and paid him less than they would have paid a wiser man.

Valnois knew this, but accepted the fact as an inevitable consequence of taking life pleasantly. His life, such as it was, suited his temperament better than a better life could have done. He had youth, gaiety, good looks, a crowd of friends in the present. He was the only son of a man of noble family and diminished means, and was heir to a much impoverished estate in the vicinity of Nîmes, which seemed to him like an assured fortune in the future.

Before he had spent a third night in the Rue Montorgueil, Ishmael found out that Valnois had given him his own and only bed, and had been content to spend the night in an easy chair. This sacrifice the hardy mason refused to permit any longer: and on the third and fourth night of his visit he slept rolled in a blanket and stretched in front of the fireplace.

On the fifth morning his head was sound enough to dispense with the disfiguring and suspicious bandage; and the giddiness caused by his wound had passed away. His blood-bespattered blouse had been washed by the porter's wife, and there was nothing in his appearance to mark him as one of the insurgents. He left the Rue Montorgueil before seven o'clock in the cold gray morning after thanking de Valnois heartily for his hospitality.

'Come and see me any afternoon that you can spare an hour,' said Valnois; 'I am generally out after dusk, but till dusk the chances are you will find me in my den. I like starshine and the blue night-sky better than the cold glare of day. I like my Paris when all her shabbiness and dilapidations are hidden, and she has the air of a fairy city, a place of lamp-light and mirth, music and movement.'

'You will not care to see me again,' murmured Ishmael, shyly: 'I wear a blouse, and work among other blouses.'

'I admire your blouse, and I respect you. Come as often as you like; you will never find me ashamed of your blouse. If I have any political creed at all, my colour is distinctly red. I admire the working-man and the aristocrat; the first, the horny-handed toiler, without whom society must cease to exist, and civilization stop like a watch with a broken main-spring; the second, the fine flower of fashion and high birth. It is your middle-class—your *épicier*—your Philistine, that I detest.'

On this they parted, firm friends, albeit Ishmael, the son of toil, felt a kind of shyness in his association with the brain-worker, the man whose varied collection of books in three or four different languages indicated a degree of literary culture which was a new thing to Count Caradec's son. To know a little Latin and less Greek was the Count's idea of a gentleman's education, and he had reproached his son for not having properly

mastered *ses rudiments*. But here was a youth living on a second floor in an obscure street who was steeped in German philosophy and poetry, who could read Cervantes and Lope de Vega in the original, and had the gems of the Divine Comedy on the tip of his tongue. Was it not an honour and a privilege for the *limousinant* of Belleville to call such a man his friend?

Ishmael looked about him wonderingly in the gray of the early winter morning as he made his way towards the markets and the Rue Saint-Antoine. He had expected to see traces of violence and slaughter upon every side; but the broken lamps and shattered windows of the Rue Montorgueil alone told of the brief, sharp struggle four days ago. Paris had her old air of brisk movement—the *grisettes* and workmen trudging to their workshops, their laundries, and the clerks hurrying to their offices; the heavy waggons rumbling by to the markets; and all the atmosphere in these narrow streets by Saint-Eustache laden with odours of garden stuff and *charcuterie*, sea-fish and river-fish, butchers' meat and poultry.

Ishmael had taken the direction of the Place de la Bastille with the idea of looking in for a minute or so at that dingy ground-floor den in the Rue Sombreuil, just to see how it had fared with Pâquerette and her people on the terrible night of the fourth. He knew not how quiet the Faubourg Saint-Antoine had been while the heart of Paris was throbbing so stormily, beating itself to death yonder by the markets. It seemed to him that Saint-Antoine, renowned of old, could hardly have preserved a sluggish neutrality till the very end. The sleeping lion must have been aroused from his dull lethargy by the noise of that massacre on the boulevard.

He found a little crowd hanging about the archway leading into the quadrangular yard—a little crowd of outcast boys, some women of the rag-picker species from the Rue Sainte-Marguerite, two or three *grisettes*, a fat man in a white apron from a pork-butcher's shop round the corner; and on inquiring the cause of this unusual excitement, he was told that there was a funeral coming out presently—the old *pochard* of the ground floor had gone to thank his baker. Père Lemoine, the *trolleur*, was to be buried that morning.

'Père Lemoine dead!' exclaimed Ishmael. 'Then there was more fighting here on the fourth, I suppose—more barricades?'

'*Pas si bête*,' said the porkbutcher; 'we are all for the Prince Louis Napoleon, a clever man, who will make trade good in Paris, and who ought to be Emperor. What do we want with barricades? Père Lemoine went farther afield to get his number. He was amongst those curious folks who insisted upon being out on the Boulevards, although they were warned by the

President's placards that wise people were to keep safe and snug within doors. And now he is going to eat dandelions by the roots in the cemetery yonder.'

'But there were those who stayed at home and were shot in their own houses,' grumbled one of the old women. 'The soldiers fired in at the windows; little children were killed in their mothers' arms. There was never such a thing in Paris before.'

Ishmael passed in among the crowd, and went across the yard to Père Lemoine's lodging. The hearse was standing before the door, the shabby public carriage in which the *trolleur* was to take his last ride to the place of pauper graves in the great graveyard at the end of the Rue de la Roquette, just beyond the jail and the scaffold—the prison-houses of the dead hard by the prison-house of the living. The undertaker and his two men were in the darksome bedchamber at the back, nailing down the coffin, while Mère Lemoine and Pâquerette, dressed in shabbiest black, second, or, perhaps, third-hand mourning, bought from the merchant of frippery in the Temple, sat on each side of the door, waiting to take their places in the procession, the old woman weeping audibly, and with red, swollen eyelids and drawn-down lips; Pâquerette pale as the very dead, but with dry eyes.

There were a bottle of bright yellow fluid, half-a-dozen glasses, and a dish of sweet biscuits on the table, by which the Auvergnat was standing, with a glass in his hand, ready to offer hospitality to any neighbour who came in. He and the two women were to be the only followers of that sable carriage yonder. He had brought a wreath of yellow *immortelles* to lay on his old employer's coffin.

Ishmael shook hands with Mère Lemoine, and murmured a few kind words; whereupon the fountain of tears flowed still faster, and, in a voice broken by whimpers, the old woman told him how she and Pâquerette had sat up all night on the fourth, waiting for the patron to come home; and how, when they heard next morning of the fusillade on the boulevard, their first thought had been to go all over that part of Paris hunting for the missing Père—to go even to the Élysée itself, if need were, to demand his blood of the President, or to St. Arnaud, to ask what the soldiers had done with an honest man, who had never harmed any one in his life. And then the Charabia had suggested that he should first go to the Morgue, and see if, by evil fate, this poor soul were lying on the cold stones there, under the little fountain of icy water—unclaimed, unknown; and he had gone, and he had found his old friend, with a dreadful wound upon his jaw, and shot through the lungs; and he had brought

him home ; and it was he who was to pay for the grand cloth-covered coffin, with its white metal furniture, for Pâquerette's sake.

The Charabia nodded assent with a friendly air, and offered Ishmael a glass of brandy, which was refused. Pâquerette said not a word. She had hardly lifted up her eyes since Ishmael entered. She sat looking down at the skirt of her rusty black gown—pallid, motionless, expressionless, like a creature without thought or feeling.

'Do you know how he came by his death ?' asked Ishmael.

'Only that he was among those who were picked up on the boulevard after the fusillade,' answered the old woman. 'Some say that shots were fired at the soldiers from the roof of a house, and that they were maddened by the idea that they were all going to be shot down by the people, and that they turned upon the crowd and fired without orders from any officer in command.'

'They were drunk,' said the Charabia ; 'they were all drunk. They shot and killed for pure sport—women, old men, children—aiming at them as if they had been sparrows, betting on their shots as in a billiard-room. It was fine sport ; and this time it was chiefly the *bourgeois*, the folks who wear broadcloth and fine linen, who suffered. It was a grim spectacle to see the well-dressed corpses lying in the gutters. Père Lemoine had no business there. I am sorry for him. He has swallowed his spoon sooner than he need, poor devil.'

'Shall I walk to the cemetery with you ?' asked Ishmael, an offer which was promptly accepted by Madame Lemoine. That would make them four instead of three, and the Charabia could walk with Pâquerette, which was only right. And now the coffin was brought out and placed upon the bier, and covered with the rusty velvet pall ; and the funeral train of four followed the hearse out of the muddy yard into the muddier street.

Ishmael, having offered his company out of pure kindness, was content to walk beside Mère Lemoine, albeit she dragged her slippers along the greasy stones, and was obviously illuminated. She expatiated on the merits of the deceased, deprecated while admitting his faults ; praised her own goodness and fidelity as wife and household-manager—with tears which flowed so freely from her inflamed eyelids and a-down her soddened cheeks, that it might have been thought that the *trois-six* she had been imbibing freely for the last four days found an outlet in this form.

Ishmael bought a votive wreath, with R.I.P. in black upon yellow, on the way to the cemetery, and laid it reverently upon the vagabond's coffin before it went down into the *tranchée gratuite*, a recent improvement upon the common grave ; for in

these long trenches the coffins were no longer heaped one on the top of the other, but ranged decently in a row, twenty centimètres asunder. Here, until five years after the last coffin has been laid in the trench, the pauper slumbers undisturbed, as safe as the rich man in his freehold, and the cross which marks his last resting place is no longer a mockery and a fiction as it was in the days of common graves.

The funeral service of the poor is not a protracted office. Père Lemoine was laid in earth in less than twenty minutes, and it was only ten o'clock when Ishmael bade Pâquerette and her grandmother good-bye at the gate of Père Lachaise.

'When is the wedding to be?' he asked, as he shook hands with the old woman.

'In a fortnight: the sooner the better. Who is there to take care of her now, poor child, since the good old grandfather is lying underground?'

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## CHAPTER XIV

### 'SHE IS MORE PRECIOUS THAN RUBIES'

ISHMAEL walked slowly towards Ménilmontant after leaving the gate of the cemetery, his mind full of Pâquerette and her destiny. He had given more than one furtive glance at the Charabia during the funeral service, and he had not been favourably impressed by the man's appearance, considered in his character of bridegroom-expectant. The fellow was honest enough, perhaps; but the heavy brow, the small, dull eyes under bushy, projecting brows indicated a nature of the lowest order—loutish, sullen, tending almost to the savage. And by the side of this short, thick-set figure, this heavy, bull-dog visage, Pâquerette's slender form, and pale, small face, looked more than ever like some white wild flower, which too rough a gust of March wind would snap from its frail stem. There was something revolting to human nature in the idea of an union between two beings so different—almost as revolting as the idea of union between creatures of dissimilar species—wolf and lamb, vulture and dove.

And yet the thing was to be, and it was no affair of Ishmael's. Better, it would seem, that Pâquerette should have such a husband as this brutal Auvergnat, if he could provide

her with a comfortable home, than that she should languish in that den in the Rue Sombreuil at the mercy of a drunken grandmother.

'Let me think of my own business,' said Ishmael, setting his face towards the yard of the master builder, his *bourgeois*, his patron, anxious to see if the *coup d'état* would make any difference in his chances of employment.

The bourgeois was on the premises, and in excellent spirits. Nothing succeeds like success; and that bold stroke of the other day had made Napoleonic rule already an established fact. The builder was Bonapartist to the tips of his nails. He talked as if these days of December were the beginning of a millennium for all France in general, for the building trade in particular.

'Look at the Empire!' he exclaimed; 'it was an age of activity, of colossal undertakings—bridges, canals, fountains, markets, catacombs. The Bourse, the cemeteries of Montmartre and Père Lachaise, we owe them all to the uncle. Who can doubt that the nephew will do even greater things? We live in a faster age; we can command larger resources. We shall get more bridges to build, larger markets, finer barracks, new theatres. The Prince and De Morny are two of the greatest stock-jobbers in Europe. Take my word for it, Ishmael, the age of enterprise has begun.'

There was plenty of work for Ishmael, and an advancement in his position, which he had not expected. The foreman of the works, finding things thrown out of gear by the agitations of the third and fourth, had consoled himself at the wine-shops of his quarter, the *assommoirs*, or spirit-shops, which dealt in liquid fire—bright to the eye, pleasant to the jaded palate, devilish in its effect upon body and brain; for while the rich Parisian may be intemperate with impunity, the working man of Paris is supplied with a stuff called brandy, in which there is not one drop of the juice of the grape, and for *him* drunkenness means madness and death. And in Paris there are twenty-five thousand drinking shops of different degrees.

In the foreman's case three days sustained upon this kind of nourishment had resulted in an attack of delirium tremens. The man was at the hospital of St. Anne, and the master had sworn a deadly oath that a servant who could so abandon his duty at a time when there was a heavy contract on hand should never again touch a sou of his money.

Ishmael said a good word for the foreman, who had always treated him like a brute, but who had an honest, industrious little wife and a brace of pretty children. The patron was inflexible, and Ishmael found himself promoted to the post of overseer of the other men.

Happily, he was a favourite with them all; and as the late foreman had been detested, his appointment gave universal satisfaction. He had been suspected at the beginning of things —doubted, disliked even, as a person of a different class—that most obnoxious of all beings, a gentleman in disguise But, by degrees, his frank, straightforward bearing, his thorough truthfulness, his generosity of heart and willingness to help a fellow-workman in distress, had overcome all prejudices against him; and as time went by Ishmael had come to be a kind of king in the builder's yard—chosen in somewise, perhaps, for his good looks and superior height—his air of physical power and vigorous health—a proud, handsome head, towering above the feebler city-bred workmen by three or four inches—chosen as Saul was chosen to be king over Israel.

His advancement to be foreman of the works doubled his pay. He felt himself on the road to high fortune.

It was in the week that followed the *coup d'état*, while everyone was talking of the plebiscite, the probability of a second Empire, and the dark rumours of a good deal of unpleasantness, as it were, below the surface, in the shape of transportation and exile, that Ishmael was surprised by a *rencontre* with an old acquaintance.

He had not forgotten his mother's maid Lisette even in the excitement of his new life in Paris. He had taken a good deal of trouble in hunting for her, visiting almost every *charcutier's* shop in the outskirts of the city, but without success. He did not know the name of the man she had married; and among the ladies who devoted themselves to dealings in the varieties of pig-meat, he could hear of no one at all resembling the friend of his desolate childhood.

It happened, however, about a week after the fatal fourth of December, that Ishmael, being indisposed for his customary studious evening, went farther afield than usual for his dinner, and patronised a *tapis franc* in the region of Montmartre, and within two or three hundred yards of the theatre at which his mother and his mother's maid had been performers thirteen years before.

When he had dined he went to look at the building which had been a mystery to him in his childhood. He had seen it six months ago, out of repair, closely shut, the spurious Grecian façade plastered with bills of all kinds. To-night the composite pillars, the stuccoed portico were bright with new paint and cheap gilding, and a row of coloured lamps shone in front of the entrance. Above the cornice of the portico, in characters of flame, appeared the new name of the building, 'Palais de Cristal,' so called after Sir Joseph Paxton's famous palace of

industry in Hyde Park, an idea which had vividly impressed the Gallic mind. The old Escurial theatre had been improved off the face of the earth, and the Palais de Cristal, a new *café-chantant*, entrance ten sous, *consommation libre*, had arisen in its place.

Ishmael paid his ten sous to a smartly-dressed matron, who occupied a counter near the entrance, and went into the auditorium. It was a long room, something like a chapel, with rows of rush-bottomed chairs and little tables placed at intervals on each side of a central alley. At the end, where the altar would have been in a church, there was a platform, lighted with coloured lamps, and beautified by artificial roses and lilies in gilded vases. A grand piano occupied the centre of the platform, and on each side of the piano there were three or four arm-chairs, covered with crimson velvet, for the performers.

The platform was empty, and the body of the hall was but thinly occupied when Ishmael took his seat very near the footlights. He had to wait some time before the performance began, during which period the *élite* of the neighbourhood were dropping in, making a great noise with their boots, and a greater noise with their tongues, ordering divers refreshments of the woman at the counter, or of the waiters in the hall, disputing, laughing, squabbling about seats, rights and counter-rights. Ishmael began to think he was in a fair way to waste his evening, yet he had a fancy to see what kind of a place this was in which his mother's beauty had once shone as a star. He heard a woman telling a friend that the platform yonder, with its lamps and flowers and muslin curtains, was only the old stage upon which she had seen 'Cartouche' and the 'Tour de Nesle' acted five years before.

And now a resplendent person in evening dress, with a white waistcoat and shining boots, entered from a curtained doorway, took his place at the piano, and began to play *Partant pour la Syrie*, as a triumphal march, to which entered four other resplendent personages of the male sex, conducting four ladies in gorgeous raiment, who, with the air of duchesses, sank languidly into crimson fauteuils, and smiled their gracious acknowledgment of the noisy greeting of the audience, all tired of waiting, and ready to chink their teaspoons or wine glasses rapturously at the smallest provocation.

Ishmael scrutinised the painted faces, the sleek shining hair, with the eye of a hawk. Not one of those radiant creatures would ever again see her thirtieth birthday. More than one was decidedly on the wane; but painted eyelashes, rouge, and *accroche-cœur* curls are almost as good as the *beauté du diable*. At sight of one of those artistic countenances, round plump

cheeks, a low forehead plastered with little rings of black hair, plump shoulders, and whitened arms, in a glistening green silk gown, the skirt an ascending scale of scalloped flounces, Ishmael gave a start which almost capsized his next neighbour's *chope* of Bavarian beer. One glance told him that the lady in green was his old friend Lisette, her beauty amplified, coarsened, perhaps, by the passage of years, but just the same kind of Lisette he had known thirteen years ago. He wanted to go to the platform that moment and shake hands with her across the lamps and flowers; but he restrained himself, and sat waiting and watching.

There was a variety of music, which argued a catholic taste on the part of the audience. A sentimental duet about the stars and the sea was followed by a comic duet about a matrimonial quarrel; and then came a hunting song; and then the quartette from 'Rigoletto,' sung with tremendous force on the part of the soprano, until the gas-globes rattled and the hall rang again. And when the applause after this great work had subsided, Lisette, who had been silent hitherto, came simpering to the footlights.

There was a storm of applause directly she came forward—cheers, familiar little cries and greetings, as at the appearance of an old-established favourite who has taken root in the very hearts of her audience. She smiled round at her admirers, she curtseyed, laughed, cleared her throat with a coquettish little cough, adjusted her gilt bracelets, and then, still broadly smiling, with reddened lips, she began the following masterpiece of the comic muse as extant in Paris at the close of 1851:

'Ma future est jeune et belle,
Et t'rait l'bonheur de mes jours,
Mais son defaut, la cruelle!
C'est de s'enrhumer toujours.

'Elle s'enrhume quand il gèle,
Encor' plus quand il dégèle,
Hiver, été, frimas, brume,
Ma foi! ce n'est qu'un long rhume.

'*Parle.* Ce n'est pas un crime, vous savez. Ce n'est ni un meurtre, ni un vol, ni un coup d'état, mais c'est embêtant, tout de même. Quand je l'emmène à Bougival, par exemple, dîner sur l'herbe, un vrai paradis l'été près de l'eau, par un soleil à faire flamber les cheveux, eh! bien, malgré tout, elle s'enrhume toujours!

'Et puis v'la qu'elle se mouche,
Qu'on dirait d'une tempête!
Tirant son nez en farouche,
C'est à vous rompre la tête.

'Á la danse, ou quand on mange,
Même quand j'lui fais l'amour!
Célestine, adorable ange!
S'obstine à s'moucher toujours.'

When the entertainment was over, Ishmael tore a leaf out of his pocket-book, and wrote upon it, 'Will Madame Ladronette' (that was Lisette's stage name) 'speak to an old friend from Brittany, presently, at the artists' door?' This brief missive he entrusted to one of the waiters, and then he went out into the street, and found his way to an obscure little door in an alley at the side of the Palais de Cristal.

Here Ishmael found another person in attendance—a short, stout man with a white apron tucked aside under a pilot coat.

'Are you waiting for one of the artists, Monsieur?' this person asked, after two or three minutes, with a somewhat suspicious air.

'I am waiting for Madame Ladronette.'

'Indeed!' said the stout man, with a start and a snort; 'and may I ask what business you may have between eleven o'clock and midnight with an honourable lady like Madame Ladronette?'

'You can ask, assuredly, when you have told me by what right you expect to be answered.'

'By my right as Madame Ladronette's husband, sir; I think that ought to be enough,' retorted the other, fiercely.

'Oh, then you are the *charcutier*,' exclaimed Ishmael, laughing.

'Yes, sir, I am the *charcutier;* I hope you do not consider that a dishonourable trade?'

'Sir, it is at once respectable and useful,' answered Ishmael, gravely; 'and as you have established your right to know my business with Lisette—Madame Ladronette, I should say—I am pleased to tell you that, although you see me to-night a great hulking fellow of over six feet high, I was once small, friendless, helpless, unhappy; and that in those days your wife was very kind to me.'

'She has a heart large enough to be kind to the universe,' said the *charcutier*, who was a pompous little man, and had an air of swelling as he spoke as if literally puffed up by his own conceit. 'But here she comes to answer for herself.'

Lisette emerged from the greasy little swing door, neatly and even fashionably clad in a large cashmere shawl, which reached almost to her heels, a black velvet bonnet, and a thick lace veil. She went up to Ishmael, who was standing in the light of the lamp over the door, and looked at him intently for a few moments, and then she said:

'It is Count Caradec's face, only handsomer! Surely you are not——'

'I was once Sébastien Caradec, the little boy you used to take out walking in Paris years ago; but I have done with the old name and the old history, and I am now Ishmael, foreman of the works at the Rose Yard, Belleville.'

'Sébastien—that poor little creature!' she repeated, hardly comprehending the latter part of his speech. 'Such a great tall dark fellow, with a black moustache, and the shoulders of a grenadier. Why, I must be getting an old woman. Figure to yourself, then, Alphonse: this young man is the same I have told you about—whose mother—old songs, all that—and I was almost as fond of him as if he had been my own flesh and blood; and after his mother's death, his father took him back to Brittany. But how comes it that you are in Paris, Sébastien, and wearing a blouse?'

'Because I was not wanted at Pen-Hoël. My father has a wife and other sons. I was one too many. There was no place for me beside the hearth. So I cut the knot of the difficulty—an unloved son is a difficulty, you see—by coming to Paris, where I can earn my own living, and am in nobody's way.'

'It was bravely done,' said Lisette. 'You have your poor mother's independent spirit.'

And then, at the invitation of the *charcutier*, whose name was Alphonse Moque, Ishmael went home to supper with his old friend and her husband. They lived within two or three streets of the Palais de Cristal, in an old house in an old street, one of the little bits of old village architecture to be found here and there on the skirts of Paris. But though the shop and the rooms above it were low and small, they were smartly furnished and neatly kept. Madame Moque was very proud of her home, and was of an industrious turn now that she had a stake in the country. She served in the shop, she looked after the housekeeping, and at night she sang comic songs to a rapturous audience. Alphonse was proud of having secured such a versatile wife.

Ishmael sat late over the little supper-table in the warm, snug sitting-room, with its new mahogany furniture and bright yellow damask curtains, clock and candelabra in alabaster and gold—all paid for out of Lisette's salary, as Monsieur Moque proudly stated. It was not that the *charcutier* did not earn money by his business; but the profits of the pork shop were of too serious a character to be frittered away upon furniture or fine clothes. Monsieur Moque's superfluous cash went to the public funds, to make a provision for old age; but Lisette did what she liked with her professional earnings.

'It was a bargain between us,' said Alphonse, gazing at his wife with fatuous admiration. 'I did not desire to be richer by my union with one of the most famous women in Paris. I only sought the honour of being allied to her, the glory of being able to tell the world she is mine. If you knew how that stage door is sometimes besieged of a night by men who come from the fashionable quarters of Paris—ah, from the Elysée itself—you would not wonder that I was uncivil to you,' added Alphonse, excusing himself to Ishmael.

It was his dearest delusion that his wife's footsteps were haunted by the fine flower of Parisian dissipation. He had an idea that the Prince-President himself had made particular inquiries about her, had suggested that she should be engaged at one of the Boulevard theatres. But the inexorable malevolence of rival artists had prevented the gratification of that august desire.

Lisette smiled modestly, and murmured deprecatory little remarks now and then, reminding her husband that she was not so young as she had once been, that even beauty will fade, and so forth. But she appeared, on the whole, to believe in those shadowy rakes from the Boulevard des Capucines who were supposed to haunt the stage door, but whom mortal man had never yet encountered.

Ishmael went back to his lodging in the early morning, pleased at having found a friend of the past, albeit that friend was associated with the darkest hour of his life. There had not been much brightness in his life hitherto; but it seemed to him that a brighter day was now dawning, the beginning of a substantial success. His mind was full of plans, ideas, improvements, inventions; and, if there were indeed a time of gigantic enterprise at hand, he felt that for men of his stamp there must be plenty of work, and with the work golden opportunities.

Strong in his confidence in his own power, and buoyed up by hope, Ishmael's days and nights knew no weariness. He lived less in the present than in the future: every blow of hammer or mallet, every hour of toil, seemed to him a stage on the journey of his life, and whether the stage carried him an inch or a mile, it was enough for him to know that he was always moving forward, that every day of labour was a day of progress.

## CHAPTER XV

### 'AS A ROE FROM THE HAND OF THE HUNTER'

EIGHTEEN FIFTY-ONE was dead and gone, its bloody close a thing of the past—an old song—forgotten by almost everybody except a few hundred prisoners waiting their doom at the Fort of Bicêtre, or languishing in the Prince's own old prison of Ham, or voyaging over tempestuous seas on their way to Cayenne. The world of Paris troubled its linnet's head but little about that obscure minority in durance or exile. The new year began with pomp and splendour, flourish of trumpets, roll of organs, clank of helmet and sword, a grand *Te Deum* at the cathedral of Notre Dame. The great bell, whose monster clapper sounds but on occasions of grandest import, pealed with deep and solemn voice over the house-tops of the *Cité;* and in that mighty fane, gorgeous with velvet and brocade, gold and jewels resplendent with myriad tapers, lamp-lit altars, Paris thronged to see the Dictator enthroned upon a daïs, while the hierarchy of France invoked Heaven's blessing upon his lofty mission as elected ruler of the French people, the chosen of seven millions and a half of voters.

Once more the Imperial Eagle, symbol of Roman prowess, Roman pride, spread his broad pinion over Paris. The Republican catchwords, Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity, were effaced from the public buildings, and the Prince-President left the Elysée to take up his residence at the Tuileries. One of his earliest uses of despotic power was to confiscate the property of the Orleans Princes. This was the first flight of the eagle.

The new year was only a week old when an event happened which threw the whole scheme of Ishmael's life out of gear, one of those few events in a man's life which are fatal.

He had sat up late overnight studying a famous work on the construction of bridges, lent him by his master. The subject was full of mathematical difficulties, and as Ishmael was, for the most part, a self-taught mathematician, having learnt only the elements of the science from good Father Bressant, he had found the treatise on bridges stiff work, and had toiled deep into the night without making any great progress.

His sense of being baffled by the difficulties of the subject so oppressed him, that, when he lay down, in the hope of getting

three or four hours' rest before the working day began he found himself unable to sleep for more than ten minutes at a stretch. His brain was fevered by the work he had been doing, and, over and above his vexation at non-success, he had a strange, vague sense of trouble, that weighed him down. Every now and then he turned restlessly on his hard pallet, or started up from his pillow, as if there had been a scorpion lurking under it.

He tried to reason with himself, to calm down nerves and brain. He told himself that the difficulties which had baffled him to-night would be subjugated by persistence and labour; and yet, and yet the sense of worry, the feeling of oppression, were not to be overcome—grew stronger rather—as the darkness wore on towards dawn.

At last, in a moment of vexation, he gave up the vain effort to sleep, and rose and dressed by candle-light. It was half-past five o'clock, and quite dark; but Ishmael thought that a walk countrywards, even in the darkness, would tranquilize his nerves, and make him fitter for the labour of the coming day. When he tried to open his door, he encountered an obstacle outside, which prevented the door from opening more than half-way. A very human groan, breathed in the darkness, told him that this obstacle was a human form.

'Who is there?' he asked, startled.

'It is I—Pâquerette.'

'Pâquerette!'

He went back and re-lit his candle hastily, and then went out upon the landing.

Yes, it was Pâquerette. She was sitting on the floor, in the angle between the door and the wall, her head leaning against the plaster. Her face was deadly pale, and her forehead was daubed with blood.

'Pâquerette, in Heaven's name, what has happened to you?' asked Ishmael, putting down the candle hastily inside his room, and then stooping to lift up Pâquerette in his strong arms.

'You are hurt! Who hurt you?—where?—why?—'

He gasped these questions breathlessly while he carried her into his room and placed her in his arm-chair.

'You are shivering,' he said. 'I'll light my stove, and make you some coffee. But how did you come here, poor child? Tell me—tell me everything.'

'I came late last night—after every one was gone to bed.'

'And you have been sitting there, on that cold landing, all night!'

'Yes. It has seemed a very long time. But I did not want to disturb you; and I knew that you would come out in the

morning, and that you would be kind to me. You were always so kind to me!' she said, looking up at him with plaintive blue eyes, innocently, with unconscious love. 'I have the basket that you gave me, and the flowers and berries I picked that day. The Charabia was angry about them once, and wanted me to burn them; but I would as soon have thrown myself into the fire. The basket is outside. Please pick it up for me, Monsieur Ishmael.'

He obeyed, full of wonder, full of pity. He brought the basket from the landing, and put it on the table beside Pâquerette, among his books and papers of last night. And then he knelt down and lighted the stove, and filled the coffee-pot, which was all ready for his morning meal. He had acquired all the handy ways of a bachelor mechanic since his coming to Paris, and his preparations for breakfast were dexterously and rapidly made in the dim light of the single candle. He glanced at Pâquerette now and then, but he asked her no further questions. He could see that she was exhausted by some great agitation, by a night of cold and suffering; and he was content to wait until her strength should revive.

When the coffee was ready, he coaxed her to take a cupful, waiting upon her, soothing her with womanly tenderness and patience. He felt as if she had been a wounded bird that had flown in at his window for shelter—a weakling that he could cherish and comfort in his bosom. He had no sense as yet of the incongruity of their position—no consciousness of the hand of Fate, albeit that ominous feeling of trouble, that vague oppression had been weighing him down all night.

At last, when she had taken the coffee and the fire had warmed her, she began to talk, a little incoherently, childishly even; but Ishmael was patient with her, and let her tell her pitiful story in her own way.

'I daresay it was very wrong to come to you,' she faltered; 'I had no right, no claim; but you were always kind, and where else could I go? I dared not go to the Benoîts, for if they had hidden me ever so, grandmother would have found me in their apartment, and she would have ill-treated them for sheltering me. You are a strong man; she cannot beat you, or abuse you.'

'You were quite right to come to me if you were in trouble,' said Ishmael, kindly.

He was kneeling by the stove, looking up at her as she talked, the candle-light shining upon her blood-stained forehead and sorrowful eyes.

'I hated him always, hated him from the very first. Did not I tell you that I hated him that night when we were going home from Vincennes?'

'The Charabia? Yes, I remember perfectly. That made me think it very strange you should be willing to marry him.'

'I was not willing. I never left off hating him. When he touched my hand I felt as if I wanted to run away to the end of the earth. One evening he kissed me; and I was awake all night, shuddering at the loathsomeness of that kiss. But they told me I was to marry him, and that I was very lucky to have such an offer of marriage. It would be a blessing for all of us, grandfather said—for them and for me—for the Charabia had saved a little fortune, and would make a home for us all. We were all to live with him in the room behind his shop; grandmother was to do the housework, and I was to live like a lady!'

'And on this you thought better of him?' speculated Ishmael.

'No, no, no! I refused with all my might. I told them I would rather be lying in my grave than married to that hateful man; and then they scolded me, and told me what my mother had been; oh, is it not cruel to talk of the dead like that—the poor, helpless dead—who cannot rise up and answer? And grandfather told me that I must marry the Charabia. I had no choice; it was his wish, and I was bound by the law to obey him. He had brought me up, and clothed me, and fed me, and I was his property, to do what he liked with. It was his will that I should be the Charabia's wife. Many and many a time he told me the same thing, and repeated the same cruel words. Sometimes, when he was out, my grandmother would be even more cruel, for she used to hit me and knock me about every time she was angry, and grandfather did not often beat me.'

'Not often! Oh, poor child, poor child!' sighed Ishmael.

'When grandfather died there was hardly any money in the house; we were so poor, that we should not have been able to live if it had not been for the Charabia. He gave grandmother some money for the *secrétaire* that grandfather had been working at before his death, and when that money was gone—and grandmother had taken the tool-basket to the Mont de Piété, and that money was gone—the Charabia gave her a little money to go on with. And then he said it was time we should be married, and then grandmother would have a home with us. They settled it all between them—we were to be married to-morrow. The banns were put at the church door, and the same day the Charabia brought me two new gowns and a shawl—a beautiful shawl.'

'And that made you happy, Pâquerette?'

'Happy! No, I was miserable, though grandmother kept saying how grateful I ought to be, and how the Charabia had sent me a *corbeille*, just as if I were a lady. I was miserable, and I was afraid, dreadfully afraid—afraid of grandmother, afraid of

the Charabia. They both scolded me at every turn ; and she used to pinch me if she saw me crying when the Charabia was with us.'

Pâquerette turned up the loose sleeve of her old stuff gown, and showed a lean white arm, which had been mercilessly clawed by her harpy grandam, and which bore that lady's sign-manual in ever so many places, printed in purple.

'Last night, after the Charabia was gone, I told grandmother that I could not and would not marry him. It was no use talking to me—I would throw myself in the Seine rather than go to the Mairie with that man. She had been drinking—more than usual, I think ; and she flew at me, and pushed me against the wall, and held me there, and said she would stand over me till she had brought me to reason ; she would beat out my brains rather that be conquered by me. I think I must have fainted with fright and pain, for I can remember nothing more till I woke from a kind of sleep, and found myself lying on the ground, and the room all dark ; and I heard grandmother snoring in the inner room where she sleeps.'

'Poor little martyr !' said Ishmael, with infinite compassion.

'When I remembered what she had said, I made up my mind to go out quietly and throw myself into the river. It was a very short walk to the Quai de la Rapée, and in the darkness no one would see me jump into the water. I knew that, if I stayed in that house, grandmother would make me do what she wanted. What power had I to resist her ? I went to the door and looked out. There were very few lights burning in the windows looking into the yard, and I knew it must be late. I was just going out when I remembered the basket you gave me ; and I went back and took it from its place in my room. I meant to drown the basket as well as myself, so that the Charabia should not ill-use it when I was dead. And then I went out and shut the door behind me, and nobody heard or noticed me. The yard door was not locked—it hardly ever is locked at night, for there are lodgers who come in at all hours.'

'And you could think of drowning yourself ! Oh, Pâquerette, how terrible !'

'I meant to do it. Anything was better than to be made to marry that hateful man. The streets were very quiet when I went out—quiet, and cold, and dark—very cold ; and the river seemed a long way off, for my head had bled a great deal, and I was very weak. When I got to the river-side the water looked cold, and black, and dreadful ; and I was afraid to throw myself off the quay. I stood ever so long looking down at that dark water, shivering, afraid. Once I shut my eyes, and took a step forward, trying to drop over the edge blindfold. But I could not do it. I was afraid of the water.'

Afraid of death, you mean, poor child. Life is sweeter than we ever think till we face that unknown country beyond.'

'I must be a coward,' said Pâquerette, 'for I could not kill myself. I had thought of you a good deal all the time—remembering how kind you were; wishing that you were near to help me; wondering if you would ever hear of my death; if you would be sorry. The basket I was carrying seemed a link between us somehow—it was something that your hand had touched; and then I thought I would go to you, and ask you to hide me, to save me from grandmother; and then I left the river, and found my way here. Twice I met a gendarme, who asked me where I was going, and I told him I lived at Ménilmontant, but had been taking some work home to the Faubourg Saint-Antoine, and had lost my way. So then the gendarme told me which way to come, and at last I found this street. I passed the house one day with Pauline Benoît, and she showed me your window. The door below was unlocked, and I opened it softly and crept upstairs, and sat down in the corner by your door to wait for the morning.'

'What time was it when you came upstairs?'

'A clock struck two just before I got to your door.'

'And it was nearly six when I found you. Poor child! you had been sitting in the cold four dismal hours.'

The first glimmer of chill, gray light stole through the Venetian shutter as they were talking. It was seven o'clock, a dull, rainy morning. That gleam of daylight seemed to awaken Ishmael to the realities of life. He began to consider how he was to dispose of this uninvited guest, this wounded bird which had flown to his nest for shelter. He got up from his knees and began to pace the room slowly to and fro, glancing every now and then at Pâquerette, who leant back in the capacious arm-chair, very white, very weary-looking, but refreshed by the coffee and comforted by the warmth of the stove.

What was he to do for her? How best protect her from her grandmother's wrath, from the pursuit of her hated lover? She could not remain under his roof. That was clear. Nor could she seek hospitality from the Benoît girls. There could be no safe shelter for her in the Rue Sombreuil. Poor, helpless creature, what was he to do with her? Some safe haven must he find her, and at once. There was no time to be lost. That wretched old hag, her grandmother, might guess to what refuge she had flown, and might come in quest of her before the day was much older.

There was only one friend of whom he could think in his difficulty, and that was Lisette Moque, the *charcutier's* wife, otherwise Madame Ladronette.

'I am going out to see a person who may be of use in giving you a home for a little while,' he said, presently. 'Try to get some sleep while I am gone; and perhaps, if you were to bathe your head in cold water, it might do you good. There is some in that pitcher by the washstand. You can lock the door directly I am gone, and if anyone knocks, do not answer.'

'You don't think grandmother will come and take me away?' she said, with terror in her eyes.

'She may come; but only keep your door locked till I return, and I will answer for it she shall not take you away.'

'She has the law on her side—she said she has the right to do what she likes with me,' faltered Pâquerette.

'She shall not touch a hair of your head. I will denounce her to the police as a murderess if she come here after you. They shall see your wounded head, they shall hear your story. *Au revoir*, Pâquerette. Answer no one—keep quiet and snug till I come back.'

## CHAPTER XVI

### 'CAN THE FLAG GROW WITHOUT WATER?'

It was nearly nine o'clock when Ishmael went back to his lodging, and he was troubled at the idea of being late at the works of Belleville, where his presence was doubly needed now that he was a person in authority. He had found some little difficulty in persuading Madame Moque to take charge of Pâquerette, a young woman who had run away from her grandmother. That might be dangerous. As for the blood upon her face, that was nothing wonderful. A grandmother—and, indeed, that nearer relation, a mother—had often occasion to chastise a rebellious child. A little blood made a great show, but might really mean no more cruelty than a box on the ear; and where was the mother who had never boxed her daughter's ears?

Ishmael tried to explain that this was a case of real cruelty; that Pâquerette had narrowly escaped being murdered. And for the rest, Mère Lemoine had no legal authority over this poor waif, whose name and whose parentage were involved in mystery.

'That makes no difference. If Mère Lemoine has brought the girl up, Mère Lemoine has a legal hold upon her,' answered Monsieur Moque, tenderly trimming a pig's head *aux truffes*.

A good many things were *aux truffes* in Monsieur Moque's shop, but the bodily form of the truffle was not often visible. That aristocratic tuber was represented by an all-pervading flavour, which imparted a curious family likeness to all the comestibles sold in the establishment.

'There is only one way for it,' said Lisette. 'The girl ought to go into a convent.'

Ishmael started at the suggestion. It seemed reasonable, kindly, even; and yet he was chilled and saddened at the thought of that young life entombed within the four walls of a convent.

'Give her a shelter for a few days while we consider what is best to be done with her,' he pleaded. 'She is a quiet, inoffensive creature; and I will pay whatever you think right for her board. Her grandmother will never trace her to this house.'

Lisette declared that there was nothing would please her better than to oblige her dear Monsieur Ishmael. There was an alcove in the little salon, in which Pâquerette could sleep. Lisette hoped that she had cleanly habits, and would not injure the furniture.

Ishmael was sure that she would be careful; and it was settled that she should be taken in for a week or so, to give time for the arrangement of her future.

'She is very poorly clad,' said Ishmael. 'If you will spend two or three louis in buying her a decent gown, I will supply the money. I wish I could do more.'

'It is a great deal for you to do,' said Lisette. 'Sixty francs will not go far; but I dare say I can spare a few things out of my own stock, and we will manage to make her a trousseau. If she is going into a convent, she will not want much—not even underclothing with some orders. The Carmelites, for instance, wear nothing but woollen next the skin.'

Ishmael shuddered at this detail. Conventual life only presented itself to his mind as a living death. And all his clubs and societies, his pamphleteers and theorists, were virulent in their abuse of monks and nuns.

He hurried back to his lodging. Pâquerette unlocked the door as he came up the last flight of stairs.

'I knew your footstep,' she said.

You have learnt it very quickly,' he answered.

She had slept an hour, she told him, and was very much refreshed by that peaceful slumber in the warmth of the stove. She had washed, and had arranged her hair neatly, and had tidied the room and swept the hearth; and Ishmael thought his bachelor-chamber was beautified somehow by the touch of womanly hands.

'You will have to stay here all day, Mademoiselle Pâquerette,' he said, becoming more ceremonious than he had been in the surprise and agitation of the morning; 'and I am afraid you will have a very poor dinner. I have brought you a little ham,' taking out a small white paper parcel from his pocket; 'and in this cupboard'—opening a door by the fire-place—'there are plates and knives, bread and butter, and a bottle of wine. You must try and make yourself comfortable here till the evening, when I can leave work; and then I will take you to a person who will give you a comfortable home—till you and your friends have decided how you are to manage your future life.'

'I have no friend—but you,' answered Pâquerette.

'You have the Benoîts.'

'Yes, they were very good; but I dare not go to them now.'

'No; but they may come to you, perhaps. I am sure they may be trusted.'

He had no leisure for talk; so, after a hasty adieu, he started for Belleville at a pace which reminded people of the giant and his seven-leagued boots.

It was after dark when he went back to his nest on the fourth story. Pâquerette had found the day passing long, longer even than her days in the Rue Sombreuil. Unhappily, this child of the people had no resources of an intellectual kind. She could read but little, and with extreme difficulty; and the whole world of books was for her an undiscovered country. She looked with absolute wonder at Ishmael's small library, something over twenty volumes, neatly arranged on a shelf beside the alcove in which the narrow bedstead was screened by a brown and yellow cotton curtain. She had never seen so many books in her life before. She took one off the shelf and peeped into it, thinking there might be pictures, a childish story that she could spell out, something to amuse her; but there were only pages of close printing, tables of figures, awful diagrams, wheels, pumps, pistons—images that appalled and bewildered her. She did not try a second, but went to the window and looked out, screening herself with the curtain lest her grandmother's dreaded eyes should be gazing upward to that fourth story.

The street was a dull street, the neighbourhood half town, half country, with a stamp of poverty and desolation upon all things the eye looked upon. A drove of cattle were going by to the public slaughter-house. Yonder, white against the wintry gray, rose the populous city of the dead, the cemetery of Père Lachaise, the field of rest. Pâquerette soon grew tired of looking out of the window, and went back to the stove, where

she sat on the floor in the warmth, as she had sat through many a winter afternoon in the Rue Sombreuil when her grandmother was out gossiping and there was no one to upbraid her for her idleness—a poor little Cinderella, neglected, ignorant, hopeless, unfriended, forgotten.

She sat looking at the little patch of red light in the front of the stove and thinking: thinking and wondering, vaguely, disjointedly, like a child. How good he was to her, this tall, big, noble gentleman, whose image stood out in a kind of luminous atmosphere against the dimmer background of the greensward at Vincennes, the leafy glades of Marly. He was associated with the two happy days of her joyless life—days so unlike all the rest of her existence, that it seemed as if she had been lifted into another world for a little while, only to be dropped back into the abject misery of common earth afterwards. So interwoven was the thought of him with that transient bliss, that she almost fancied it was he who had made her happiness. To him she had flown in her trouble as a bird flies to the hill where its nest is built. How good he had been to her! not angry with her for troubling him, as she had feared he might be. How kind his voice, his eyes, his gentle touch! If she could have had a little kennel outside his door, in that angle where she crouched last night, footsore and stiff, and aching in every limb—just a little hutch in which she could curl herself up of a night, and in the daytime be his servant, clean his room, cook for him, wait upon him—she could imagine no more blissful existence. But this was not to be. He was going to take her to someone else, who would be kind to her. She was not grateful in advance for that kindness from strangers. She wanted *him* to be kind, no one else. Would he but treat her as kindly as good men treat their dogs, she would be content. She would love him and be faithful to him as dogs are faithful. There was a young house-painter in the Rue Sombreuil who had a long, lanky beast of the lurcher species, which adored him, slept outside his door of a night, followed at his heels wherever he went, carried his stick or his hat. Pâquerette would have been to Ishmael as that dog, could she have chosen her destiny.

He came back soon after dusk, and asked kindly how she had managed to get through the day, whether she had had enough to eat, and if her head had left off aching. And then he opened a parcel, and gave her a little shawl which he had bought for her on his way home—a neat little checked shawl such as young Frenchwomen of the working classes wear pinned across their shoulders. He had made this further outlay wishing her to look as respectable as might be when he presented her to Madame Moque; and the warm gray and scarlet shawl, neatly

folded across the pretty shoulders, concealed the threadbare gown, and was certainly an improvement.

Pâquerette was enraptured. The Charabia had, as it were, loaded her with gifts, and she had hardly thanked him. Last night she had left all his finery—necklace and earrings, gowns, shawl—flung in a chaotic heap upon her wretched little bed. But she was overcome by this last kindness from Ishmael, just as she had been by his gift of the basket on Saint John's Day.

When they were leaving she stopped suddenly. 'My basket,' she exclaimed. 'Oh, please let me have my basket.'

He handed it to her, smiling, yet deeply touched by this earnestness of hers—touched to think that she had treasured those withered buds and berries, sprays of oak and beech, for half a year, and had remembered them last night when she was face to face with the awful alternative of suicide.

They said very little as they walked at a brisk pace to the distant Rue Franch-colline, where the *charcutier's* shop stood out with a certain smartness and dazzle from the general dulness of the street. It was in an old and crowded quarter, not far from the *abattoir* where were sacrificed those pigs which formed the basis of Monsieur Moque's stock-in-trade.

Madame Moque received Pâquerette with kindness leavened by condescension. She was curiously impressed by her appearance, which, despite her shabby gown, and clumsy boots, and pinched, pale look of a creature reared in abject poverty, had a certain air of distinction, an elegant fragility, which the abigail's quick eye discounted at a glance.

'She would be absolutely pretty, or better than pretty, if she were well dressed,' thought Lisette; and she began to have ideas about the platform of the Palais de Cristal, and to speculate upon whether something might not be made by forming the girl for a public career.

'If she has but an ear, and a little sprig of a voice now,' thought Lisette.

In a French concert-room voice is ever a secondary consideration; and Lisette knew by her own personal experience what a very small organ can be made to satisfy a Parisian audience.

Moved by reflections of this business-like character, Madame Moque took the girl suddenly in her arms and kissed her on both cheeks.

'She shall be to me as a younger sister,' she said. 'Have no fear, Monsieur Ishmael. I shall find the way to make this poor child happy. And now go to your dinner, and give yourself no further care. Come and dine with us next Sunday, and you shall see what I have made of Mademoiselle Pâquerette.'

'Please do not call me Mademoiselle,' said the girl, dazzled by the splendour of Madame Moque's salon, which was as new and as wonderful to her as would have been the most gorgeous reception room in the Elysée or the Tuileries. That gold and alabaster clock actually ticking, those candelabra with candles in them, the flowered carpet upon a red brick floor, the stiff, vivid-yellow damask, the new shiny mahogany: what matter that it was furniture of the very poorest, vulgarest type, the coarsest workmanship, the general effect was overpowering, to an eye educated by the sombre tones, the dull squalor of the Rue Sombreuil. And when, after Ishmael's departure, Madame Moque showed Pâquerette the little bed behind the yellow curtains which draped the alcove, a very narrow and, sooth to say, very hard little bed, cramped and stony as the grave itself, the girl was completely overcome.

'I am to sleep in this room!' she exclaimed, opened-eyed with wonder.

'Yes; it is as a favour to Monsieur Ishmael. For no other consideration would I have put up a bed in this room; but when he asked it of me as a concession to an old friend—'

'He is an old friend,' murmured Pâquerette, and her eyes lighted up with keenest interest in the question. 'You have known him very long?'

'I have known him ever since he was a baby. I knew him as a child, as a boy.'

'*Ciel!* And when he was little was he handsome as he is now—good as he is now?'

Lisette sighed, closed her eyelids very tight, with a look which meant unutterable things, and shook her head vehemently.

'There are things which must not be spoken about,' she said. 'You must never question me about Monsieur Ishmael's past history—never. You must accept his kindness, and be grateful. No more. You see him as a workman, labouring shoulder to shoulder with other workmen, in a blouse and linen trousers. That is well, since it is his choice so to live. You will think of him and speak of him as Ishmael, the stonemason, and under no other character. That is his wish.'

'If he were a king, I could not honour him more than I do,' said Pâquerette, with innocent frankness; 'but I am glad he is only a workman. He would seem so far away if he were anything else.'

Again Madame Moque screwed up her eyelids, and extinguished her bright beady eyes, and shook her head significantly; but Pâquerette was too simple to understand this by-play.

Ishmael dined with the Moques next Sunday, and found Pâquerette wonderfully smartened and improved in her appear-

ance by Lisette's care. If he could have found any fault, it was that she was a little too smart, too *apprêtee*—the artistic carelessness of her loosely piled-up tresses a shade too elaborate —the picturesque sailor-knot of her *ponceau* neck-ribbon a thought too intentional. But it was all Lisette's doing, and it was meant in kindness; so he suggested no fault in his protégée's *ensemble.* She wore a very old black silk gown of Lisette's, which had been subjected to every process of revivification known at that period of art; but, although the gown was in a manner at the death-rattle, it had been made to fit Pâquerette's slim figure so perfectly, and it was adjusted with such a superior style, that it looked almost elegant.

After the dinner, which was excellent, Madame Moque suggested a walk on the Boulevards. The night was frosty and clear, the stars were brilliant, and the lamps at the cafés would be brighter still; or, at any rate, a nearer, more human brightness, that one could enjoy more. There was even a possibility of a theatre, Lisette thought, if she once got the two men out of doors; and of all earthly pleasures, Lisette adored the *paradis* of the Théâtre Français, where, if the acting were sometimes above her head, the gowns and jewels always appealed to her finest feelings. There was no performance at the Palais de Cristal on the Sabbath, so she, who had on week nights to amuse other people, was free to seek amusement for herself.

'If I do not see other talent occasionally, how do you suppose I am to create any original effects?' she asked the *charcutier* sometimes, when he was reluctant to pay for a couple of seats at a theatre.

To-night Madame Moque had a secondary motive for wishing to be out of doors. She wanted a confidential talk with Ishmael, and no such conversation was possible in the yellow salon, twelve feet by fourteen, where every word anybody said must needs be overheard by everybody else.

So directly dinner was over they started for their evening walk, Madame Moque suggesting that they should take their coffee at the *Cafe de la Rotonde*, in the Palais Royal, which would be much gayer than taking it at home.

'And ever so much dearer,' said Monsieur Moque, who never took his eye off the goal which he had set before him at the beginning of his career, namely, a house at Asnières and a snug little income from the funds. Even a couple of cups of coffee at a fashionable café meant so many sous subtracted from the sum total of his future wealth—so many days pinched off the period in which he was to live at his ease in his suburban villa.

Lisette told her Alphonse to offer Pâquerette his arm, and

to go on in front, while she took possession of Ishmael, and they two brought up the rear. In this wise she was sure of not being taken by surprise by Pâquerette creeping up behind and hearing herself the subject of conversation.

'Well,' she said, as soon as the others were out of earshot; 'what do you think of her? Have I not begun to form her already?'

Ishmael did not want to be ungrateful, but he was too sincere to be capable of concealing his real sentiments.

'Do not make her a coquette,' he said.

'Make her a coquette—I!' cried Madame Moque, as if the suggestion of such a possibility were absolute foolishness. 'Coquetry is not in my line, I assure you. A respectable married woman, with household cares, and a business, and a profession—there is very little leisure left in my life for coquetry. But I confess to taking some pains with that poor benighted child, who had no more idea of doing her hair than a heathen. I thought you would like to see her looking nice.'

'So I do,' answered Ishmael; 'only I fancied she had somewhat of a coquettish air—a consciousness of being pretty, which I never noticed in her before.'

'She is *not* pretty,' said Lisette, decisively; 'at best, she is only interesting. And as for consciousness, if you suppose that she, or any woman living, is without vanity, you are less sensible than I thought you.'

'She looked charming in that gown of yours,' pursued Ishmael, with an apologetic air.

'She has actually *no* figure,' protested Lisette. 'I had to take that gown in ever so many inches.'

Ishmael could not help thinking that, if this were so, the negative type of figure had merits in the way of grace and elegance which he had never observed in the positive.

'And now I want to go to the bottom of things, to have a serious talk with you,' began Lisette, in a graver tone. 'You know that I took care of you when you were a baby, and my feelings for you are purely maternal.'

'You were always very good to me,' answered Ishmael, with a sigh, thinking how little he knew of maternal affection, which in his case had meant no more than capricious kisses, occasional kindnesses, and habitual neglect.

'Well, then you will believe that I am your friend in all I say. Now, I want to know what you mean to do with this girl—at once—before we go a step further. She is a very nice little thing—granted; interesting, and with a certain child-like grace, which might be developed into the real Parisian *chic*.'

'Heaven forbid!' cried Ishmael,

'But what then? First and foremost, do you mean to marry her?'

Ishmael reddened to the roots of his hair, and then gradually paled again. First a hot feeling, and then a cold feeling; and the coldness meant a negative reply.

'I have no such thought,' he said. 'It will be many years before I think of marriage; and when—if I ever do marry, I should like my wife to be my superior—a woman of education, who could make me better than I am. I should like to be able to reverence my wife.'

'Then Pâquerette is out of the question,' replied Lisette, with evident satisfaction. 'And now the question is, what are we to do with her? To my mind there are only two ways in which she can be provided for. The first, which I suggested the other day, is to put her into a convent; the second, which I have no doubt she would prefer, is to bring her out at the Palais de Cristal.'

'Bring her out—Pâquerette—as a concert singer!' cried Ishmael, thinking Lisette must have suddenly gone out of her wits.

'Why not? She has no voice, I grant you; but I have found out that she has an ear—an ear as fine and true as a skylark's. And *I* can make her sing. She could sing little *patois* songs, dressed as a peasant. She is no beauty; but in a Normandy cap, a pair of *sabots*, a red petticoat, and a little blue bodice, she would take Paris by storm. Her ignorance, her childishness would not matter a bit. That would all pass for *chic*, originality. Let me train her, and bring her out in my own way, and she shall astonish you before you are a year older. It shall cost you nothing. I will keep her, and teach her, and clothe her at my own expense; and I will ask no more for my pains than her salary for the first three years.'

'Let her appear in that place—before all those men—smoking, drinking, laughing, quarrelling—the very offal of the town!' said Ishmael.

'Your mother acted in that place, Monsieur,' replied Lisette, deeply offended.

His mother! yes. The thought was horrible. Still more horrible was it to remember that when his mother acted in that theatre she was already so deeply sunken in the mire, that one degradation the more hardly counted. But Pâquerette, poor child of the gutter, was yet unsullied. And he shrank from the thought of placing her in such an atmosphere.

'I myself have the honour to appear there nightly,' continued Lisette; '*I* do not feel myself degraded by the applause

of the people. I wonder that you, who wear a blouse and live by the labour of your hands, can speak so slightingly of your brother-workmen.

'There are people and people,' answered Ishmael. 'I hope you do not take the class who drink, and smoke, and blaspheme at the Palais de Cristal as the type of the artisan, any more than you would those devils who used to smoke and drink at the wine-shops at the barriers in the year '32, watching the hearses going to the cemetery, and calling out, "Your good health, Monsieur Morbus," as the dead went by. I have no clanship with such men as I saw at your concert-hall.'

Lisette, still offended, owned that the frequenters of the Palais were, perhaps, not of the first class. They liked songs that were *un peu risquées*, speeches that were pronounced *avec intention*. But what then? One must laugh.

'I should not like to hear them laugh at Pâquerette,' answered Ishmael, sternly. 'I should feel inclined to pitch them head over heels into the street. No; I would ever so much rather she went into a convent, though that seems very dreary.'

'It is dreary; she would pine to death in six months,' said Lisette, who had set her heart upon bringing out Pâquerette, with an eye to profit. There was money to be made by a young, attractive *debutante*; and Lisette had put the girl through a few little experiments in the vocal and histrionic way, and had discovered that she would be very quick to learn anything, and, indeed, possessed the mimetic faculty in a marked degree.

'One thing is certain,' she said, presently; 'that poor child must not go back to the Faubourg Saint-Antoine to be beaten to death by her grandmother.'

'No, she must not go back,' answered Ishmael, gravely; 'she must go into a convent. I will make inquiries to-morrow.

'It will cost money,' said Lisette.

'I must find the money.'

They were on the boulevard by this time. They had pierced through narrow streets to the Boulevard Montmartre, and were now descending into the full glory of the Boulevard des Italiens, which was crowded with pedestrians, and gay with a cold and frosty brightness, the lamps below burning brighter, just as the stars burnt above, in the clear, keen air. Tortoni's and all the fashionable cafés were crowded, warm with much people and much gas, glowing with light, sonorous with the buzz of voices and the chinking of glasses and teaspoons.

'I am dying for a cup of coffee,' said Lisette. 'Suppose we go to Laperle's?'

Laperle's was one of the smaller cafés, an old house, with the ground-floor rooms almost as low as an *entresol*—a snug little nest of three small rooms, opening into each other, with sanded floors, originally intended as a compliment to the English patrons of the establishment. Laperle's was a favourite house with the artistic classes, the Bohemians, the *Râtés*, and was always full. The ranks of failure are never thinned—every day brings recruits to *that* regiment.

Lisette pushed her way to the one vacant table, in a snug little corner near the stove, and the other three followed her. The whole place was like an oven, the atmosphere a mist of light, and dust, and heat, and tobacco smoke, flavoured with cognac.

'How delicious after the cold outside!' said Lisette, with a retrospective shiver.

'*Boum*,' cried a waiter, in response to the charcutier's summons; and Lisette, who was more at home than her husband in the cafés of Paris, ordered four *demi-tasses*, with accompaniment of cognac understood.

The room was crowded. They had only just space enough to slip into their seats at the little table. Pâquerette, as the smallest of the four, screwed herself into the angle of the wall, where she sat looking at the company and the lights with wide-open eyes. It was not by any means a splendid place of entertainment, but it was curiously different from 'The Faithful Pig,' or the little wine-shop in the Rue de la Roquette, to which she had gone upon occasions in quest of her grandfather. There was here a life and brightness, a flavour of elegance, gaiety without drunkenness, coats instead of blouses, tobacco of a different odour—all things that were new to Pâquerette.

While she was gazing, interested, amused, as in a kind of fairyland, her eyes suddenly encountered another pair of eyes, which fixed her own by the intentness of their gaze.

The eyes belonged to a young man, elegantly but carelessly dressed, with coat wide open over a velvet waistcoat, Byronic collar, necktie loosely fastened, as if it were midsummer.

He was leaning with his elbow on a table, talking to a burly, dark-visaged man, who looked like a painter. He had been declaiming vehemently to his friend a minute ago, but now he was silent, absorbed in his contemplation of Pâquerette.

He was fair and pale, slender, fragile-looking: the very opposite of Ishmael, with his dark, strongly-marked brows, black eyes, broad shoulders, six feet. Pâquerette looked at the stranger curiously, wondering that there should be people so different.

Ishmael sat with his back to the room, facing Pâquerette. He saw that sudden wondering look of hers.

'Do you see anyone you know here?' he asked.

'No,' she said, blushing at the question.

'But you were looking as if you recognised some one,' he said.

He turned involuntarily as he spoke, and surveyed the crowded room.

The young man who had been looking at Pâquerette rose hastily, came over to Ishmael, and gave him a friendly slap on the shoulder.

It was Hector de Valnois, Ishmael's friend of the fourth of December.

'Why have you forgotten your promise and never been to see me?' he asked.

'Not because I am ungrateful, but because I did not want to trouble you too soon,' answered Ishmael, grasping Valnois' proffered hand, such a small, womanish hand in the stonemason's broadened palm.

You would not have troubled me. Well, I am glad I have met you if only by accident. Do you often come here?'

'I was never here till to-night.'

'So! I thought, if you had been a *habitué*, I must have met you before now.'

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## CHAPTER XVII

### 'A MAN'S HEART DEVISETH HIS WAY'

ISHMAEL introduced his friends to Monsieur de Valnois, who made himself at once at home with Madame Moque, and would fain have been as easy with the *charcutier*, but that respectable citizen had a shyness in the presence of the artistic classes, the outward sign of which was a kind of sullen ferocity, not over-pleasant to strangers.

'Your friend is red, I take it,' whispered Hector to Ishmael; 'vermilion among the reds.'

'On the contrary, he is a staunch Bonapartist, and sighs for a second Empire.'

'Then be assured he will be gratified: the Empire is at hand. The very air we breathe is full of signs and tokens of an approaching despotism; a friendly despotism, a paternal

despotism, a despotism encouraging to trade, favourable to the development of art, the foster-mother of genius, mark you; but a despotism all the same. We have a press that is bound hand and foot, a Senate that is packed with zealots for one cause—a Police of unparalleled strength and acuteness. In a word, we are on the eve of a second Empire, more brilliant, more splendid, more costly, more luxurious than the first—as gaslight is to candlelight, as aqua-fortis to cognac.'

'Enterprise has prospered and good work has been done for the world by despots before now,' said Ishmael, remembering what his employer had told him about the building trade.

'My friend, all great works have been done under tyrants, from the Pyramids to the Escurial,' answered Hector. 'Show me any great work that has ever been achieved by Republicans. *Their* mission is not to do, but to undo.'

'In America——', suggested Ishmael.

'Oh, don't talk of a handful of savages *là bas*; creatures in wampum and feathers.'

'The Republic of Venice——.'

'A tyranny divided by ten, a despotism upon ten feet. But it is a solecism to talk politics in the presence of ladies; and Mademoiselle has a frightened look, as if our big words had scared her. Is she your sister?'

'No.'

'Ah, I forgot. You are alone in Paris.'

'Quite alone. Madame Moque is an old friend; and Mademoiselle is a guest of Madame Moque's.'

'I see; and the starlit night tempted you all to the boulevard. There will be skating before long if this frost continue. Do you skate, Mademoiselle?'

Pâquerette blushed, and faltered a negative. She had seen the boys sliding and skating on the canal de l'Ourcq. She had even longed to join them a year or two ago, when she was in the *gamine* stage of her existence. Beyond this much, she hardly knew what skating meant.

'It is a new emotion—a new rapture. You should make Monsieur Ishmael teach you; or, failing that, let me be your instructor. Suppose we arrange a party for the Bois. If the wind do not change before Wednesday, the lake will be frozen. What say you, Madame Moque: shall we arrange a party for Wednesday afternoon—a skating party?'

'Mademoiselle is going into a convent next week,' interjected Ishmael, curtly; 'she will have no time to learn skating.'

'Going into a convent? *C'est raide!* And you bring her to Laperle's to prepare her for conventual life! Does that count as a part of her noviciate?'

Ishmael made no reply, and Hector went back to his friend at the other little table after a smile and a bow to the ladies of the party. But ten minutes later, when they were all leaving the café, Hector came up behind Ishmael on the boulevard, and slipped his hand through his arm. 'I want five minutes' talk with you, my friend,' he said. 'If you are walking towards the Porte St. Denis, so am I.'

'I would as soon go that way as any other if these ladies have no objection,' answered Ishmael, looking at Lisette, who declared immediately that she had been on the point of proposing that they should walk up the boulevard, and go home by the Rue St. Denis, even if it were ever so much longer than those narrow streets and short cuts by which Alphonse had brought them.

'It is a delightful night, and we are out to enjoy ourselves,' said Lisette, who was favourably impressed by this elegant young man in the loose, steel-gray overcoat with a fur collar. A fur collar always appealed to Lisette's feelings. It was suggestive of rank and fashion, of noble youth which runs through a fortune, and gives nice little suppers to actresses at Véfour's, or the Maison Dorée ; to come to an untimely close afterwards, perhaps, on one of those marble couches in the Morgue.

So Ishmael and Hector walked up the boulevard with Lisette between them, while Monsieur Moque still kept a few paces in front with Pâquerette upon his arm. The boulevard was a new experience to her ; the lights, the people, all radiant under the brilliant winter sky, seemed to belong to another world. She had but one flaw in her delight, and that was the ever-present fear of meeting her grandmother roaming about in quest of her ; but she comforted herself with the thought that locomotion was not in Mère Lemoine's habits, and that it would be only by a superhuman effort she would get as far as this part of Paris.

'What an interesting, child-like face that is,' said Hector, with a motion of his head towards the girl in front of them. 'Why convent ?'

'Because she is about the most friendless and desolate creature you can imagine,' replied Ishmael, 'and a convent is the only possible home for her.'

'I am friendless and desolate—very desolate when I have failed to get my last *vaudeville* accepted by one of the theatres,' said Hector, lightly ; 'but I don't go into a monastery.'

'You are a man, and can fight the battle of life.'

'So can a woman, and she is much better armed than we are. There is always a chance for a woman. There is always one fool in the world who will waste his love and his money upon

her. If she is ever so old and ugly, she has only to wait her time, and she will find herself somebody's *beguin*—somebody's mania. There are those who worship the poetry of ugliness. There are devotees who adore a squint, who see grace in dry bones, beauty in a splay foot. I assure you, Ishmael, there never was a Cleopatra living who could not find her Antony ready to lose a world for her. And when Cleopatra has the languorous blue eyes, the poetical palor of your young friend yonder, she is sure of success in life.

'What kind of success?' asked Ishmael, in a low voice, that trembled ever so little with suppressed indignation. 'There is a good fortune that leads to the gutter and the hospital—perhaps you mean that.'

'Far from it, my friend. The gutter and the hospital are remote contingencies in every woman's life, just as there are rocks and sandbanks that lie in wait for every ship that sails. Many a vessel gets safely to her haven, and why should not your little friend there be lucky?'

'The only luck she could have would be to marry an honest man,' answered Ishmael, bluntly; 'and there are not many men who would care to marry a girl brought up in dire ignorance and reared amidst squalor and drunkenness.'

'There are men who will sacrifice a few prejudices for the sake of a pretty face. I do not say that Mademoiselle yonder is absolutely beautiful; but there are some faces that are worse than beautiful. They do more mischief in the world than beauty pure and simple. But pray, who is the young lady, and how do you come to be interested in her fate?'

Ishmael told Pâquerette's story as briefly as possible.

'And she fled to you for refuge, having no other friend; and, to reward her faith, you will hide her from all that is joyous and beautiful in life; entomb her within the four walls of a convent—where, as she is friendless and penniless, she can only enter as a lay sister—a drudge—a *femme de peine* without wages—condemned to wear coarse clothing, to eat coarsest fare, to sleep on a pallet, to rise before dawn, to pray continually, to obey blindly, to be silent when her young lips are eager to be talking, to be grave when her young heart would fain rejoice in laughter, to forego all human love, all human praise and admiration, for all the days of her life. That is how you would recompense her for that innocent faith, that lovely, childlike trust in your goodness and your bounty which brought her to your door, wounded, massacred almost—a creature most worthy of pity and of kindness. I cannot applaud your chivalry, Monsieur Ishmael.'

'Believe me, I have no desire but to do what is best for

Pâquerette,' said Ishmael, considerably shaken by this passionate summing-up of plain facts.

'I am entirely of Monsieur's opinion,' said Lisette, smiling and sparkling upon Hector with the bright black eyes and the white teeth which time could not wither. 'I consider that it would be positively cruel, an act of tyranny, to shut that poor child up in a convent. She has had little enough pleasure in life—none that I can make out except two solitary days in the country when she met Monsieur Ishmael. And to bury her alive among a set of stern nuns before she has tasted one of the pleasures of life. No; as you say, Monsieur, let her have her chance. Every woman has a right to her chance. There is always the convent, my faith, when one has had enough of the world; just as there is always the river when one has had too much of life. Let the poor little soul have her opportunities, and she may make an artistic success. I pledge myself to put her on the high road to fortune if Monsieur Ishmael will only let me have my own way.'

Upon this there followed a long argument about the Palais de Cristal, in which Lisette urged the wisdom of allowing Pâquerette to make her *debut* at that place of entertainment as soon as she was able to sing three or four *patois* songs. Hector offered to write them for her, and to get them set to music by his friend the *répétiteur* at the Palais Royal. The thing was quite in his line, and they would produce songs which should take the town by storm.

Ishmael argued gravely against the whole scheme. Pâquerette was unsuited to such a life. The Palais de Cristal was a low place.

'What does that matter? Let her but make a hit with one of my songs, and she will be engaged at a boulevard theatre in a trice.'

A boulevard theatre! Poor little Pâquerette! Ishmael had been to the boulevard theatres. He had seen a fairy spectacle in which songs and dances and crowds of lightly-clad sylphs were the distinguishing features. It was before the days of the *Biche au bois*, and the *pièce à femmes* had not yet reached its climax; but Ishmael had seen enough to prejudice him against the stage of the boulevard; and he felt that he would rather see Pâquerette entombed in the gloom and silence of the severest conventual order than exhibiting her fragile, flower-like prettiness side by side with the women he had seen across the footlights.

He was not a man to be talked out of his opinion even by his best friend, and though he respected Hector as a man who knew the world and knew Paris, he was not persuaded into approving the concert hall or the stage as a future for Pâque-

rette. But he was influenced, and deeply, by what Hector had said about convent life; and he told himself that in this the Parisian had spoken the words of truth and wisdom, and that he, Ishmael, had no right to sacrifice this girl's liberty to the convenience of the moment. She had flown to him for a refuge, and was he to give her a cage? She had come to him for bread, and could he give her a stone?

He remembered, with a thrill of tenderest pity, her happiness that spring afternoon at Vincennes when they two had danced together on the greensward; he recalled the picture of her enraptured face as she flitted from flower to flower in the wood at Marly; and, remembering these things, was he to give her over to the gloom of an existence in which there should be no dancing, no summer holiday in woodland or park? Was he, who had no right over her except her own helplessness, her child-like trust in him, was he to be the harsh arbiter of her destiny, and to deliver her over to a death in life within stone walls?

In his inexperience he pictured a convent as infinite gloom—a place of everlasting penance, and prayer, and self-sacrifice, and surrender. He thought of something much worse than the reality, and he shuddered at the idea of his own hardness of heart.

'You are right,' he said, presently; 'she shall not go into a convent—that was a wild idea of mine. We must find a home for her somewhere with some good woman who will teach her a trade. She will be satisfied with very little, and we will not barter her liberty against a crust.'

'You had much better let Madame work out her own little scheme,' said Hector, lightly. 'Here we are at the gate; here our ways part. Come and see me soon, Ishmael. To-morrow, if you will. Good night, Madame. How about my suggestion of a party for the lake next Wednesday afternoon?'

Lisette declared that she would, of all things, love to see the skaters, should there really be ice on Wednesday; but Alphonse reminded her that an excursion to the Bois would occupy the whole afternoon, and that, as she had to go to the Palais de Cristal at seven in the evening, there would be no margin for rest, and the quality of her voice would inevitably suffer by fatigue, to say nothing of the chances of hoarseness from exposure to the cold. In a word, Monsieur Moque asserted his marital authority in the face of a too fascinating stranger; for, although he loved to talk of his wife's conquests, and the golden youth who languished for a smile from those carmined lips, he was not exempt from the pangs of jealousy.

Lisette shrugged her shoulders and submitted.

'I am a slave to my profession,' she said.

'I shall come and hear you sing to-morrow evening,' said Hector, as they shook hands. 'I feel convinced beforehand that you are throwing away your talents in that *bouge* yonder, and that you ought to be at one of the boulevard theatres.'

On this they parted, Lisette entranced by the easy charm of a manner which realised all her dreams of golden youth. De Valnois had not left them a minute before she began to question Ishmael about him. She was a little dashed upon hearing that he was only an author—an author at present hardly known to fame, and that he lived upon a second floor in the Rue Montorgueil. She had expected to be told that he was a sprig of nobility, squandering a princely fortune upon diamonds, dinners, and suppers after the play. A journalist, a playwright—that was nothing very great; but he had charming manners all the same.

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## CHAPTER XVIII

### 'MARRED IN THE HAND OF THE POTTER'

LISETTE MOQUE was a person not easily to be diverted from any scheme which she had devised for her own advantage and enrichment; and having taken it into her head that a good deal of money might be made out of so young and teachable a pupil as Pâquerette, she had already built up half a dozen castles in the air with no better basis than that golden possibility. Pâquerette was young, Pâquerette was interesting, Pâquerette possessed qualities of manner and person which, trained by an experienced mistress, might be made the quintessence of *chic*, originality, audacity; and so improved, and, as it were, crystallized, Pâquerette ought to take the town by storm, and make a fortune within the first three years of her professional career.

For a popularity so essentially transient as that of a *café-chantant* prima-donna those first three years would be the golden harvest-time. While Pâquerette was fresh, and child-like, and fair, the town would run after her. A song, *tant soit peu risquée*, from those young lips would have a piquancy to catch the jaded Parisian public, to set managers and speculators bidding against each other for the possession of the last novelty in *chanteuses de canaille*. It was aggravating beyond measure

that Ishmael's provincial notions of propriety should stand in Lisette's way to putting money in her own purse, and, in a minor degree, enriching her *protegée*.

Bent on accomplishing her purpose, Lisette held forth eloquently to Pâquerette upon the charms and chances of life behind the footlights, either in a *café-chantant*, or a theatre. She dwelt upon the sunny side of the *cabotine's* existence—the applause, the feasting, flowers, fine gowns, horses and carriages, and diamond necklaces, dropping, as it were, from the skies, so ethereal and free from earthly taint seemed their origin as described by Lisette.

Poor little Paquerette sat there sewing, turning, and patching up a winter petticoat which Madame Moque had given her, and felt as if she were wandering in some wonderful dreamland, a fairy region of bliss and light, and hothouse flowers, such flowers as Madame had shown her yesterday afternoon at a shop in the Rue Castiglione. And in such a wonderland she, Pâquerette, might dwell if she would but follow Madame Moque's advice, and learn to sing. Her voice was a poor little pipe, Madame told her, but the teaching in such cases was more than half the battle; and Madame was prepared to make a perfect slave of herself, out of sheer goodness of heart, in making Pâquerette a singer.

There was a little old wheezy piano in Madame Moque's *salon*, and on this she strummed the accompaniment of a Palais Royal song, one of the silly successes of the hour— a little *patois* song with a nonsense refrain and a little dance between the verses. Pâquerette, after three or four rehearsals, did the thing admirably. It was just as if it had been composed on purpose for her, Lisette said. The sweet, flute-like voice, the childishly timid enunciation, just touching the syllables in a coquettish staccato, the light girlish figure circling gracefully in three or four turns of a waltz to the tira-lira-lira-la of the refrain, all were perfect in their way.

'Dressed as I could dress you for that song, you would be the prettiest *ingénue* in Paris,' cried Lisette, enchanted.

She took Pâquerette to the Palais de Cristal that evening, and let her sit in a shabby little room behind the platform, from which she could hear the singing. It had been the green-room in days gone by, and reeked with the grease and tobacco smoke of a quarter of a century. The old baize-covered benches against the wall, the paper, the ceiling, all were black with the grime of generations of *cabotins*. The speculator who had renewed and glorified the front of the building had left dressing-rooms and green-room untouched. He had drawn a hard and fast line between the public and the artists. Expenditure on the comfort of the latter would have been foolishness.

Pâquerette sat in a corner near the half-open door, and listened to the songs, the laughter, the applause. She peeped from her retreat every now and then : she could see the lights, the artificial flowers, lace draperies, gilding, tawdry decorations, and across a dazzling row of lamps she saw the crowd of grinning faces melting away into an atmosphere of dust and gaslight towards the end of the building. It was a very vulgar paradise, a cheap elysium, redolent of tobacco and vile coffee, with a taint of still viler brandy floating in the air ; but the effect of the lights and music and the multitude of faces upon Pâquerette was as dazzling as the splendour of the opera house in the Rue le Peletier would have been upon a more educated mind. Never before had she seen any such haunt of pleasure. Lamplight, and music, and happy faces were an enthralling novelty.

While she sat listening, entranced, to the quartette from 'Rigoletto'—bawled with delirious vehemence by the soprano, and ranted vigorously by a very hoarse baritone, while tenor and contralto affected a coquettish lightness which touched the confines of low comedy—the swing-door of the green-room was opened and a young man entered. Pâquerette, with her eyes riveted on the platform, neither saw nor heard anything behind her, and she was startled by a languid voice murmuring in her ear :

'Good evening, Mademoiselle Pâquerette.'

She turned and recognised Ishmael's friend of the other night, the young man whose elegant manners had been so praised by Madame Moque. She only smiled shyly by way of answer, too much engrossed to speak.

'You are listening to the quartette ?'

'Yes. Is it not beautiful ?'

'Beautiful as a steam-saw. That wretched baritone's voice is a mixture of *trois-six* and river fog. And to hear such music so murdered ! Have you never been to the opera ?'

'Never,' said Pâquerette, with wondering eyes. She did not even know what the word meant.

'Ah, you must go some night and hear that quartette properly sung. It is from a new opera, produced last year at Venice.'

'What is a quartette, and what does it mean ?'

'A quartette is a concerted piece sung by four voices; and this particular quartette means—*que diable !*—it has a whole world of meanings—the plot of a novel. It means love, jealousy, revenge, murder, the concentrated passion of a lifetime. And to think that you should hear such music for the first time in such a hole as this !'

'Is it a very bad place ?' asked Pâquerette, with a scared look.

'It is a third-rate concert room; but it is much better than a convent,' added Hector, as an after-thought.

'Is a convent so very dreadful?'

'It means imprisonment for life without having enjoyed the privileges of a criminal beforehand. But your friend, Monsieur Ishmael, has promised that he will not shut you up in a convent.'

'I am glad of that,' said Pâquerette. 'I would do anything he told me to do; but I would much rather not go into a convent.'

There had been a little interval after the quartette, and now Lisette began her comic song, and shrugged her favourite shrugs, and smiled her mechanical smiles, and turned herself as upon a pivot to right and to left, challenging admiration and applause. Pâquerette did not, in her heart of hearts, admire this song of Lisette's; but she thought that it must be pleasant to be so heartily applauded, to have all those faces grinning rapturously at one's least word or look. Ignorant as Pâquerette was, she had an instinctive knowledge that popularity, the homage even of the lowest, is sweet.

Monsieur de Valnois walked home with Madame Moque and her charge, and Madame's conversation during the whole of that walk consisted of praise of the brilliant life of a concert singer or an actress, and in deprecation of Ishmael's folly in forbidding Pâquerette's *début*.

'I could launch her as no one else in Paris could launch her,' said Lisette. 'I can twist the director of the Palais round my little finger. He would do anything I asked.'

In her eagerness to secure Valnois' advocacy of her plan, Lisette invited him to supper, and at midnight the last sprig of the de Valnois found himself supping merrily enough on *gras double à la Lyonnaise*, and *pieds de mouton à la Sainte Menehould*, rinced down with a rough médoc, over a pork butcher's shop. After supper he heard Pâquerette sing her little song, which she now performed with considerable *chic*, as to the manner born. Hector thought he had never seen anything daintier or more fascinating than that small pale face, with the delicately-pencilled brows and large blue eyes, that slim, supple figure in the shabby black silk gown, the long swan throat rising ivory white above the low linen collar and cherry-coloured ribbon.

'You are right,' cried Hector; 'she would be the rage in less than a month. It would be cruelty to deprive her of her chances.'

Pâquerette heard, and her little linnet's head was bewildered with gratified vanity. If Lisette's praises had flattered her, how much more flattering was the praise of this young man, with his gracious presence, careless elegance of dress, and air

which implied fashion, aristocracy—all those wonderful attributes of mankind which had been newly revealed to Pâquerette from the discourse of Madame Moque, who took it upon herself as a duty to explain the ways of civilization, the charms and delights of Parisian existence, the habits of the boulevard and the Champs-Elysées to this poor little waif of Saint-Antoine.

From that hour Pâquerette's simplicity was a thing of the past. She had tasted the fruit of the fatal tree. She pined to know more. She was continually asking questions about the ways and ideas and meanings of that life which breathed and throbbed in the heart of that new Paris of the noble and the rich, which was as strange to her as El Dorado to Raleigh. And Lisette, who would have talked to the chairs and tables—nay, did so talk in her solitary hours—rather than not talk at all, was delighted to bring forth her stores of wisdom; to relate her manifold experiences; to tell of spendthrifts and *roués* who had flashed upon Paris, the brief glory of the hour, to crawl away to their province broken and penniless a few years afterwards, to die amidst the ashes of the ancestors they had disgraced, the land they had robbed; of beauty, lax and venal, whose butterfly career had involved the ruin of many, had given pure delight to none; of financiers, born in the gutter, who had crept by the thorny paths of usury, and trick, and falsehood to the very pinnacle of fortune; of speculators enriched by the toil of the million.

Pâquerette loved to hear these stories, related with a vivacity and freshness of colour which conjured up vivid pictures in the girl's mind. She loved to walk the streets of Paris with her mentor, to look up at the windows behind which golden youth had gambled away princely fortunes, to see beautiful women passing in carriages, women whose histories she had been told. What a strange, glittering life it seemed—all flash, and fever, and dazzle—after the dirt, and the squalor, and the all-pervading dreariness of the Rue Sombreuil!

The days and weeks crept on, and although Ishmael was still resolutely opposed to the career of a concert singer for his *protégée*, he had not yet made up his mind what was to be done with her. It was easier for him to pay Lisette ten francs a week for the girl's board than to devise a way by which Pâquerette might learn to get her own living. She was learning something every day in the Moque *ménage*, he told himself. She was beginning to be handy with her needle; she went to market with Lisette; she helped to keep the house in order; and she now and then served in the shop. She was cleverer, brisker in every way since she had left Saint Antoine. Ishmael saw her every Sunday, on which day he either joined Moque

and his wife in some excursion, or accepted their hospitality for a dinner.

But all this time, in spite of Ishmael's aversion to the stage and the concert room, Lisette went on with her training, and Pâquerette had a singing lesson nearly every day. She had a fine ear, and soon learnt to pick out melodies and extemporise accompaniments on the wheezy old cottage piano, and promised speedily to surpass her mistress both in playing and singing. And she longed to be standing on the platform, with all those faces in front of her, and to hear the chinking of glasses and teaspoons, and the thunder of applauding hands and feet.

Ishmael, in the meantime, was not a little troubled in mind about this new responsibility of his. He thought of Pâquerette at all times and seasons. He made inquiries in every likely quarter as to the occupations of women—artificial flower-making, dress-making, tailoring, shoe-binding, bedding. All the answers he got seemed alike unsatisfactory. Every trade about which he inquired was declared to be the hardest, the worst, the most disreputable, the least remunerative. There was work for women, yes; but not work that would feed them, or clothe them, or house them decently. Very few could contrive to live honestly on their wretched wages. Starvation, degradation, dishonour. His informants rang the changes upon words of dreadful meaning; and Ishmael began to despair of saving Pâquerette from the stage or the convent.

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## CHAPTER XIX

### 'SET ME AS A SEAL UPON THINE HEART'

PAQUERETTE had been a dweller in the rue Franch-colline for nearly three months. It was springtime, and the flower-markets were gay with primroses, and daffodils, and tulips. The poor had their woodland blooms, while for the rich the season of Parma violets, and white camelias, and lilies of the valley was in its glory. Paris was awakening from winter darkness to sunshine and blue skies; and already the gummy chestnut buds were glistening in the gardens of the Tuileries, the nursemaids and children were rejoicing in the advent of spring. It was mid-Lent, and the beasts were fattening for the great slaughter of Good Friday, a day sacred everywhere save in

the *abattoirs* of Paris, where the brute creation is sacrificed in readiness for the Easter festival, and for that extra good cheer which follows the orthodox fast.

For nearly three months Pâquerette had dwelt at peace in her new home. She had been decently fed, comfortably clad; she had endured neither blows nor cursing, and it seemed to her that she had lived a new life, and had become a new creature—an altogether complex machine in comparison with that Pâquerette of the faubourg, who had no care but to escape hard usage, no joy in the present, no hope in the future. The Pâquerette of to-day was full of dreams, and hopes, and vague expectancies, and dim ambitions. She had been flattered and fired by Lisette and Valnois. She had been taught to believe herself a genius in a small way—to believe that she had gifts which would bring her gold and fame, and enable her to drive her carriage in the Champs Elysées, like the beautiful women with the strange histories whom she so fervently admired.

She was pleased with her own voice, which gained strength, and clearness, and flexibility with every day of her life—pleased with her own fingers, which every day grew more familiar with the keys of the little old piano until they seemed to have an instinctive power of touching the right notes, and to fall as easily into the melody as the song of a bird. She was pleased with her existence and its variety—the afternoon jaunt to the gayest part of the town, the hours spent in *flânochant* before shop windows, gloating over splendours which, according to Lisette, might some day be within her reach.

'If you once make a success, money will pour in upon you like a river,' said Lisette.

Hector de Valnois had written a couple of *patois* songs on purpose for Pâquerette. They had been set by his friend of the Palais Royal orchestra, and one afternoon he took this gentleman to the Rue Franch-colline to hear Pâquerette sing. He was delighted with her voice and her appearance—told her she wanted one year of severe training under a first-rate master—by which description he evidently meant himself—and that she might then make her *début* at the Palais Royal itself. He said this with the air of a man who could conceive no grander arena, who knew of no higher pinnacle. To him the Palais Royal among theatres was as Cotopaxi among mountains. The only difference was in the degree of inaccessibility, and that, whereas nobody ever got to the top of Cotopaxi, artists of rare merit have from time to time succeeded in getting engaged at the Palais Royal.

Monsieur de Valnois left Paris within a week of this visit. He was going for a ramble in his beloved Rhineland, the

country in which his student-life had been spent—the land of music, romance, legend, metaphysics, which he pretended to love ever so much better than the soil from which his race had sprung. He locked up his apartment in the Rue Montorgueil, gave the key to the portress, took with him for his only luggage a very small valise, and a copy of Goethe's 'Faust,' and for all his resources five hundred francs, just received from a publisher; and he shook the dust of Paris from his feet. When the five hundred francs were gone, he would live from hand to mouth, sending an article to the papers now and then, and living on credit at his inn till the editor sent him his pay. It was a happy-go-lucky life, which suited his temperament, a more innocent life than he could live in Paris—a life under blue skies, beside blue waters, amidst vine-clad hills—a life which regenerated him, he declared, when the white-hot fever of Paris had dried up his brains and his blood.

Pâquerette missed him when he was gone, though she had seen him but seldom. There was one person less to praise her; and his praise had been so much the sweeter than all other praise because of the flavour of aristocracy that hung about his person—an indescribable refinement of tone, and manner, and bearing, which distinguished him from everyone else she knew.

Nearly three months had gone since that dark, wintry morning when Ishmael found the fugitive of Saint-Antoine crouching in the corner of his staircase, and in all that time there had been no sign or token of the old grandmother in the Rue Sombreuil. Whatever steps Mère Lemoine had taken for the recovery of her orphan grandchild had been harmless to Pâquerette. Ishmael had scrupulously avoided the neighbourhood of the Rue Sombreuil lest his very appearance there should excite suspicion. He had warned Madame Morice against any hint of Pâquerette's whereabouts to the sisters Benoît. The only wonder was, that Pâquerette had not been recognised in the streets of Paris by some wanderer from the faubourg beyond the Place de la Bastille. Yet, on the other hand, the sons and daughters of Saint-Antoine are, for the most part, local in their habits, and the Boulevards and the Palais Royal are to them as another country. And again, Pâquerette's personal appearance had been so altered by Madame Moque's training, that she might be said to have been improved out of all semblance to her former self. Who would have recognised Cinderella of the Rue Sombreuil in the young *bourgeoise* dressed in a black silk gown, a shepherd's plaid shawl, and neat straw bonnet and black veil?

The time had gone by, and Pâquerette had been unassailed; and now Ishmael thought the day had come when he might venture to reconnoitre the harridan's hole, and find out what

dangers might wait for his *protegee* in the future. So one evening in Holy Week, a clear April twilight, he descended from the heights of Belleville after his day's work was done, and entered the domain of Saint-Antoine. He did not intend to show himself to Mère Lemoine. He wanted to find out from the neighbours how she was living, and whether she had reconciled herself to the loss of her grandchild.

The sky was golden yonder towards the Barrière de l'Etoile, but in these narrow slums, and amidst these tall old barracks of Sainte-Marguerite and Saint-Antoine, darkness was already filling the corners, and brooding over the lower windows, and lurking in the passages and courtyards. In the quadrangle which had been Pâquerette's playground the shades of evening hung heavy and thick, and candlelight shone, yellow and dim, behind many of the windows in that stone well of humanity—windows which made patches of sickly light on the dank black walls. But there was no gleam of light in either window of Mère Lemoine's ground-floor. The door, which Ishmael had always seen open, was now firmly shut, and on going close up to it, he was just able to distinguish the words, *à louer présentement*, scrawled with chalk upon the greasy black door. Mère Lemoine had removed herself and her household gods to some other habitation. It might be that she had found a cheaper shelter in some garret under the tiles above his head yonder, where the roof was still faintly lighted by yellow gleams from the western sky.

Ishmael looked in at the little den of a room near the gateway, which served at once as habitation and point of espial for the porter and his wife.

The porter was mending shoes by the light of a guttering candle, the portress was frying some curious portion of a sheep's anatomy with a large admixture of onion. The reek of the onions, the tallow-candle, the shoe-leather and cobbler's wax burst upon Ishmael in a warm gust as he opened the door.

'Can you tell me where to find Mademoiselle Benoît?' he asked.

The portress looked at her family of keys, hanging in three rows on a numbered board.

'On the fourth story, the first door in the passage to the right. There must be one of them at home, for the key is gone,' she said.

'The big Lisbeth came in half-an-hour ago,' said the cobbler, without looking up from his shoe.

The big Lisbeth. It was she who had talked to him so gravely about Pâquerette, who had spoken of him as her admirer. He had some embarrassment at the idea of being

taken to task once again by this strong-minded young woman. But he did not shirk the interview. He mounted the murky staircase, where a smoky oil lamp at each landing accentuated the gloom, and he knocked at the door to which the portress had directed him.

'Come in,' cried a brisk voice, and he entered.

The room was as neatly kept as his own—beds shrouded by red and white curtains; a table laid for supper; books, flowers; and the Citizen King and his Queen smiling on the wall yonder, on each side of the little gilded shell which held holy water, decorated piously with the sprays of palm brought home from last Sunday's service.

And this was the apartment of girls who worked for their living. Why should not Pâquerette so work and so live?

'Monsieur Ishmael!' cried Lisbeth, throwing aside her needlework, and going straight up to him with an intent look in her clear, kind eyes; 'you have come to tell me about Pâquerette—poor little Pâquerette—who disappeared three months ago.'

'Why should you suppose that I know anything about her, Mademoiselle?' asked Ishmael, surprised by this sudden challenge.

'I have made up my mind about that long ago. Either she is dead, or she has found a shelter somewhere with your help. Why should I think so? For this reason: upon this earth she could count only three friends—you—my cousins and I—who count as only one—and death. She must have gone to one or the other the night she ran away.'

'You have guessed rightly,' answered Ishmael. 'She came to me, poor child, because she was afraid of death, and afraid to go to you. In this house she felt she could not be secure from her grandmother's cruelty.'

'And you,' said Lisbeth, looking at him searchingly, almost imploringly; 'there might be a worse cruelty practised by you—the cruelty of strength against weakness, cunning against innocence—the kind of cruelty which men have been practising towards women ever since the world began. I know that you admired her, that she loved you!' continued Lisbeth, passionately. 'If you have wronged her——'

'I have not wronged her. I have done the best that lay in my power. I am here now to ask your advice. A young woman's destiny is a problem not so easily solved as I once thought. As to love, that is all nonsense. Pâquerette came to me because I was a strong man, able to protect her and myself against an old shrew's claws, and because I lived a long way from her grandmother's den. For choice, she would rather have

gone to you. And now, first tell me about Mère Lemoine. Is she dead?'

'Not to my knowledge. She has been gone from here about six weeks. Her habits were abominable—she was almost always tipsy, or, at least, stupefied by drink, and her neighbours complained to the landlord that they were in peril of being burnt in their beds, as it was more than likely she would set the house on fire some night. As she was very much in arrear with her rent, he did not stand upon ceremony. She was turned into the street, and her goods and chattels, which she had reduced to the lowest ebb by pawning, were seized and sold. No one knows where she went or what became of her.'

'Then it is to be hoped that this old hag will never be heard of again, and that Pâquerette may live the rest of her days in peace.'

After this Ishmael told Lisbeth all that had happened since Pâquerette's flight, and explained his difficulties in dealing with such a delicate matter as a young woman's destiny. On one side were Madame Moque, Hector de Valnois, and Pâquerette herself, urgent for a public career; on the other, the alternative seemed only a semi-starvation, a life which, to be honest, must needs be one long slavery, ground to the dust by hard task-masters, wedded to abject poverty.

'Woman's work is wretchedly paid in Paris, I grant,' said Lisbeth; 'but, with frugality, one can manage to exist. My cousins and I live comfortably enough. But then, there are three of us, and we work very hard. We have worked ever since we were old enough to hold our needles. Poor Pâquerette has never been taught to do anything useful. No wonder she wants to get her bread by singing.'

'Will you go and see her?' asked Ishmael. 'You might be able to give her some good advice.'

'I will go to her with all my heart. I will help her with all my heart if I can,' answered Lisbeth, cordially.

And then she and Ishmael shook hands and parted.

'Forgive me for having doubted you,' she said, on the threshold of her door. 'We women have been so badly treated for generation after generation, that we have learnt to look upon man as our natural enemy.'

Feeling himself safe now in pursuing his inquiries about Mère Lemoine, Ishmael questioned the porter, who told him that the old woman had been seen on the outskirts of Paris, bent nearly double under a rag-picker's basket, and that it was supposed she had migrated to a settlement on the Boulevard de la Revolte, near Clichy, a kind of fastness of the dangerous classes known as the *Cité du Soleil*, and chiefly inhabited by rag-pickers.

Lisbeth went to the Rue Franch-colline on the following evening, after her work. It was the eve of Good Friday, and there was no performance at the Palais de Cristal; so Madame Moque and her pupil were both at home in the little yellow-curtained *salon*, while Monsieur Moque was busy below selling his *charcuterie* to those among the working classes who did not keep their Lenten fast.

The two women were engaged in the manufacture of a bonnet for Pâquerette, a new bonnet made out of the jetsam and flotsam of Lisette's old days of service, which had left her a store of silks and ribbons, laces and splendid scraps, hoarded in old trunks and portmanteaux. Pâquerette was to appear in the new bonnet on Easter Sunday, when they were to go to Vincennes for the afternoon with Ishmael. Perhaps there would be dancing, as on that other Sunday which marked the beginning of Pâquerette's womanhood.

The girl dropped her work and flew to Lisbeth's arms. She was scarcely taken by surprise, as Ishmael had called in the afternoon to tell her of his visit to the Rue Sombreuil.

'*Mon ange!*' she exclaimed; 'how glad I am to see you again!'

Lisbeth kissed her heartily, and then held her at arm's length for a minute or so, scrutinising her gravely, severely even.

'And so am I glad to see you, *mon amour;* but if we had met in the street, I should hardly have known you. I never saw such a change in anyone.'

'For the better, I hope!' said Lisette, whisking up a bit of blue silk, and giving her needle and thread a vindictive jerk.

She was not delighted at Lisbeth's visit, regarding her as an interloper, likely to side with Ishmael, and to give troublesome advice.

'I suppose most people would call the change for the better,' answered Lisbeth, with her uncompromising candour; 'but I don't like to see my little Pâquerette look such a demoiselle. She has to work for her living, poor child; and it's a pity to look above one's station.'

'Happily, no one will ever accuse you of that,' replied Lisette. 'As for Mademoiselle Pâquerette, it is so much the better for her that she has a little air of a born lady, which only wanted to be developed by a clever friend. And as for getting her living by-and-by, there is work and work; and my little friend here has it in her power to make her fortune if she likes without soiling the tips of her fingers.'

And then Madame Moque held forth upon the folly of Pâquerette's friend, Monsieur Ishmael, who wanted to deprive her of a noble career.

Pâquerette began to feel uncomfortable on perceiving that her old and her new friend were not likely to get on very well together. She asked affectionately after Pauline and Antoinette, and hoped she should see them soon.

'We are going to Vincennes on Sunday,' she said. 'There is to be a fair, Monsieur Moque says. How I wish you could all come with us, or meet us there! You would not mind, would you, Madame Moque?'

Lisette declared that nothing could be more blissful than such an addition to the party, and Lisbeth accepted the invitation. There would be no overpowering burden of obligation. The entertainment would be a kind of picnic, in which everybody would pay his or her share.

Sunday came—Easter Sunday, and the early masses in the grand old Paris churches were glorified by sunlight streaming through painted glass, and the sky above the white beautiful city, the broad winding river, was like a summer heaven, blue and cloudless. Ishmael rose soon after dawn and walked to the *cité* to hear mass in Nôtre Dame. He wore a frock coat now on Sundays, and on week-day evenings when he had occasion to leave the workmen's quarter; and he wore his coat with an easy air, which made him altogether different from his fellow-workmen in their Sunday clothes. With him the blouse was an accident, the coat an old habit. People turned and looked at him in the streets, so superior was that tall figure with the broad chest and herculean shoulders, and the kingly carriage of the head, to the effeminate and fine-drawn form of the typical Parisian. The son of the sea and the sand-marshes yonder, reared in sunlight and wind, storm and rain, was of another breed from the townsman born of long generations of townsmen.

After mass Ishmael breakfasted at a *crémérie* near the cathedral, and then set out to walk to Vincennes, where, just in that spot on which he and Pâquerette had met for the first time nearly a year ago, he found her to-day, with Monsieur and Madame Moque—animated, smiling, blushing, in her new bonnet, trimmed with broad straw-coloured ribbon, and with blue cornflowers nestling against her pale brown hair.

She was quite a different creature from the Pâquerette of last year, in her borrowed cotton frock and little *grisette* cap. Then she had looked a shy, simple child, to whom everything in life was new and strange. To-day she was a woman in the glory of early womanhood, conscious of her power to charm—looking at Ishmael shyly still with those liquid blue eyes; but the clear brightness of those beautiful eyes told a new story. Pâquerette had acquired the rudiments of coquetry.

Monsieur Moque had brought a couple of commercial friends

from the Rue Franch-colline, and Madame Moque had invited the soprano from the Palais de Cristal, with her husband, the baritone, the Rigoletto, the Figaro, who had sung in Italian Opera for one brief season at Bordeaux, about fifteen years before, and who never forgot those early triumphs on the lyric stage. The Benoît girls were punctual, and with their arrival the party was complete.

The wood was crowded with holiday people. There was a fair going on in the Cours de Vincennes, the great broad highway beyond the Barrière du Trône, and towards this festival they bent their way soon after their picnic luncheon, guided by the blare of trumpets, the roll of drums, the clamour of thousands of voices. It was the gingerbread fair; such a crowd of joyous humanity—fathers, mothers, children, lovers, *galopins* and *galopines*, *voyous* and *torchons*, Gavroche and all his brotherhood—such a crowd as Pâquerette had never beheld before to-day. She clung to Ishmael's arm as they entered the great wide boulevard of booths, amidst the din of trumpets, fiddles and concertinas, pandean pipes, cymbals and drums, bells ringing, women laughing—amidst the reek of brasiers on which men and women were frying sausages, fritters, fish—amidst the clash of swords and the trampling of horses, while, above every other sound in the fair, swelled the roar of the multitude, rising and falling with a hoarse and sonorous cadence, like the rolling breakers of a stormy sea.

Pâquerette gazed in bewilderment at the shows, the wild beasts, conjurers, giants, dwarfs, swings, merry-go-rounds. There were shooting galleries without number, learned dogs, phenomenal children, acrobats, coco-merchants with their tin fountains, hawkers of every description, street musicians of every order. On such a day as this it was not easy to get away from the crowd, nor were Ishmael's companions by any means eager for solitude while the attractions of the fair were still fresh and dazzling. It was the first fair that Pâquerette had ever seen. The circus riders, the acrobats, the clowns, the learned pigs were all new to her. She clasped her hands and opened her eyes wide with rapture at every fresh figure in the vast kaleidoscope of moving, joyous humanity. For her all the joy was real: the painted faces were beautiful; the tawdry muslin and gilt paper, the spangles and gaudy colours, were things to charm and dazzle.

Ishmael, who had seen a good many such sights in his year of Paris life, was interested and amused by the girl's pleasure. He took her into the booths and the circuses to see the amazons flying through paper hoops, the conjurers changing pocket-handkerchiefs into live rabbits, boiling pigeons alive and bringing them out of the saucepan unharmed by so much as the rumpling

of a feather. He stood by patiently while gipsies told her fortune, assuring her that there was a tall dark man with a good heart towards her. He bought her gingerbread and bonbons, fairings of all kinds. He let her drink the cup of pleasure to the dregs. He refreshed her with *brioches* and innocent red currant syrup ; and then, when all the wonders of the show had been exhausted, when the roar of voices began to have a hoarse and hollow sound, when the clash of brass, and the clang of strident laughter waxed discordant, they two wandered together away from the broad highway and its avenue of painted booths into the outskirts of the wood of Saint-Mandé—not a very lonely spot, for there were other wanderers arm in arm at every turn, couples who looked like lovers—here and there a happy pair as if unconscious of an external world, with girlish waist encircled by manly arm, *grisette's* neat little cap reclining on blouse's shoulder.

'You must be tired, I'm afraid,' said Ishmael ; 'it has been a long afternoon.'

The sun was setting yonder behind western Paris; the dust-laden atmosphere above the fair was full of yellow light, against which golden haze the naphtha lamps of the booths began to show red and angry, like the bleared eyes of a drunkard—earthy, sensual, as compared with that heavenly radiance which touched all things with beauty.

'Tired! Not the least in the world. I never had such a happy day,' answered Pâquerette, with her sweet, joyous voice, that voice which, in speech or song, had ever the same bird-like trill. 'And to think that you would like to shut me up in a convent, to bury me in a big stony prison, from which I should never get so much as a peep at such a scene as this.'

It was the first time she had ever thus challenged him—the first time that they two, together and alone, had argued the question of her destiny.

'Don't say that I would like to shut you in a convent, Pâquerette,' replied Ishmael, gravely reproachful. 'I should like to do what is best for your own happiness here and hereafter.'

The girl shrugged her shoulders and made a wry face at that word hereafter. The world which it represented was such a long way off. Why should one be troubled about it? People shut themselves up in convents for the sake of that hereafter. It was for that they rose at untimely hours, and went to hear masses in the bleak early morning. It was for that they deprived themselves of all manner of pleasures. The very idea was a bugbear.

'Why should I not be a singer? Why should I not be an

actress?' urged Pâquerette. 'That would be best for my happiness, that would make me quite happy. Yes, even if I never rose any higher than that girl we heard singing in the booth just now; and I am sure I can sing better than she does.'

'Do you think that her life is a happy one, Pâquerette? My poor child, you don't know what you are talking about.' Those poor creatures, whose red lips are one perpetual smile, lead an existence as wretched as ever yours was in the Rue Sombreuil. They have to endure toil, scanty fare, miserable lodgings, hard weather, vilest language, blows even.'

'I would rather lead such a life than go into a convent,' Pâquerette murmured, doggedly.

'You shall not go into a convent. I told Madame Moque weeks ago that I would not persuade you even to try the convent life against your will.'

'Then why not let me be a singer? I am a burden to you now, useless, costing you money every week. Let me be a singer, and I shall earn my own living. Madame Moque says I shall make a fortune—Monsieur de Valnois said so—and his friend at the Palais Royal. They must know. And it is such a pleasure to me to sing. To win a fortune like that, without hard work, just by doing the thing which one likes best in the whole world—think how delightful that must be! And you deprive me of that happiness.'

She looked up at him pleadingly, piteously, her large blue eyes brimming over with tears. She wounded him to the quick by her reproaches, half petulant, half pitiful. Never had she been lovelier in his sight than she was at this moment, leaning upon his arm—a slender, willowy figure—a fragile, exquisite, useless thing—like some lovely parasite hanging from a branch of a grand old ceiba tree in the depths of a Guatemalan forest. Tears, too, in those pathetic eyes; the first reproachful tears that a woman had ever shed for any act of his.

'My child, my heart,' he murmured, tenderly, 'you must know that I have no authority over you, no power to forbid or to deny you anything. If you must be a stage-singer—a mountebank to be applauded by a gaping crowd—to have coarse things said about you—vile looks gloating on your beauty—ah, you don't know, child; you can't understand. If your heart is set on such a life, I have no power to stop you only if, on the other hand, you have any regard for me, I beg, I implore you to avoid such a life as you would shrink from a pestilence, fever, death. No, you shall not be shut in a convent, my treasure; that would be a kind of murder—like catching a butterfly with the bloom on its wings and shutting it between the leaves of a great heavy book. No, you shall not work for your living. I

will work for you, I will cherish you. Be my wife, Pâquerette, my love and my delight, the joy of all my days, the glory of my life. The fortune shall be made, sweet one; but these strong arms of mine shall toil for it. Be my wife, Pâquerette.'

He had his arm round her, he drew her to his breast in the dying light, they two alone in the twilight, in an avenue of budding limes. He held her close to his loudly-beating heart, looking down at her with dark passionate eyes that had a power stronger than any vanities or fancies of hers. She felt like a caught bird, yet with a blissful sense of all-pervading love and protection, courage and manhood guarding and cherishing her, which made captivity very sweet.

She gave him back his kiss with a faint languorous sigh.

'Does that mean yes, Pâquerette?' he asked, looking tenderly down at the fair girlish face.

'It means whatever you like,' she answered, softly; 'you are the master.'

And this ended, for a while at least, the difficult question of Pâquerette's destiny.

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## CHAPTER XX

### 'BEHOLD, THOU ART FAIR, MY LOVE'

THE enigma of Pâquerette's destiny was solved; there was no more difficulty, no more doubt or incertitude. She was to be married to Ishmael, otherwise Sébastien Caradec, as soon as the law would allow. One obstacle which might have hindered an immediate union between the mason and his betrothed had been overcome by good fortune. Early in the year, Ishmael, by his proxy, Father Bressant, had drawn a lucky number in the conscription at Rennes, and was not called upon to carry arms for his country. This exemption left him free to pursue his career in Paris, and to take upon himself the responsibilities of matrimony.

Now, the marriage law of France is strictly paternal, and has been conceived with a strong feeling for the authority of parents, the safekeeping of children. A girl in her teens, a youth under five-and-twenty can hardly make a foolish marriage, for, in order to be married at all, he or she must first obtain the consent of the parents, or of the one surviving parent, or, in the case of an orphan, of that next of kin standing in the

place of a parent. The law is a hard one sometimes for youth and true love, as in the case of poor little Criquette, in Monsieur Ludovic Halévy's tender story; but it more often works for the protection of sweet seventeen, who cannot elope with her groom, to be bound hard and fast in the bonds of matrimony at the nearest registry; and for impetuous youth at the university or the military depôt, who cannot mate himself for life with the first pretty milliner he admires. Marriage in France is set round with a perfect *chevaux de frise* of precautions and difficulties; it cannot be huddled over in a hole-and-corner manner without giving age and wisdom a chance of warning or remonstrance. Up to the age of thirty the intending bridegroom must respectfully call upon his parents to approve of his act, and must give them ample time in which to say their say upon the subject.

Before he lay down to rest on the night of Easter Sunday, Ishmael wrote a long letter to Father Bressant, telling him what had happened, and begging him to obtain Raymond Caradec's consent to his marriage.

'I am earning my own living, with daily improving prospects,' he wrote. 'I am never likely to cross my father's path in life; I pledge myself never to ask pecuniary aid from him. I call upon him, therefore, not to thwart me in this most solemn act of my life, an act which involves the happiness and welfare of another.'

And then he went on to describe Pâquerette as an orphan—helpless, friendless, child-like, innocent. He was careful to say nothing about the lowness of her origin, but dwelt chiefly on her graces, on her solitary condition. It was a letter eminently calculated to touch the good priest's heart; but the effect which such an appeal might exercise upon Raymond Caradec remained an open question. It is difficult to foresee the conduct of a man who has given up his life to the governance of a weak and selfish woman.

Father Bressant's reply came by return of post. It was brief, but full of kindness, and the envelope enclosed the following letter from Ishmael's father: 'I am told, Sébastien, that, having taken your own course in life, without respect for me, for your name and family, or for the rank in which you were born, you now desire to marry an obscure and penniless orphan, whose very name you shrink from disclosing. This desire on your part I can only regard as the natural sequel of your rebellion and ingratitude. The runaway son finds his helpmeet naturally among the waifs and strays of society. If I had any hope that the severed tie between father and son could ever again be re-united, I should resolutely refuse my consent to such an union; but as, in every act of your life, I recognise the influence

of that tainted blood which makes you worse than a stranger to me, and as I feel the impossibility of reconciliation, I am inclined to let you have your own way ; but only on the condition that you never resume the name of Caradec, which, I am told, you abandoned on leaving your home, and that you renounce your portion in the estate which I have to leave to my sons. That estate, divided by three, would be small to insignificance : for two it will be little better than a pittance. Since, as I understand, you are earning more than you can spend, and see your way to an increasing income, it can be a very small sacrifice to you to surrender your claim upon this modest heritage for the profit of your two younger brothers, for whom you, as I believe, once entertained a warm affection. In a word, this is my ultimatum : Send me a formal renunciation of your claim upon my estate, and I will send you my formal consent to your marriage with the young person whose name I have yet to learn.'

Ishmael smiled a bitter smile as he read the paternal letter.

'Monsieur de Caradec knows how to make a bargain,' he said to himself ; 'but he is right in thinking that it will cost me very little to give up my birthright. I will let it go as lightly as Esau parted with his, and I will shed no idle tears afterwards for the loss of it. I once loved my brothers ! Yes, and with me once means for ever.'

He answered his father's letter two days afterwards, enclosing a document which he had executed with all due formality in a notary's office.

'I renounce the name which I have long ceased to bear,' he wrote ; 'I formally surrender a heritage on which I have never calculated. I began life a year and a half ago with no capital but a strong arm and a strong will. My affection for my brothers is not a thing of the past ; it belongs to the present and to the future ; and if ever the day come that they need my help, they will find that fraternal love is something more than a phrase. I willingly, ungrudgingly forego whatever right I have upon your property for the benefit of those two dear boys ; and I am, even in severance, your dutiful son,

'SEBASTIEN.'

On Pâquerette's side there were difficulties, but these were more easily overcome. Mère Lemoine was bound to her by no legal tie, but Mère Lemoine had brought her up, and the law recognised the claim of a putative grandmother who had given food and shelter from infancy upwards to a nameless grandchild. But Mère Lemoine had disappeared, and, taking her habits into due consideration, had, in all probability, gone to people the *tranchée gratuite*. It was held, therefore, after due inquiry and

some delay, that the banns of marriage might be put up, and that, after a certain interval, Ishmael and Pâquerette might be united by civil and ecclesiastical ordinances as they might themselves ordain.

These considerations and preliminaries occupied nearly three months, during which time Ishmael was working hard and gaining ground with his employers, while Pâquerette, still a lodger over the pork-butcher's shop, seemed to be very happy. She had a good deal to do for Madame Moque, who was clever in saving herself trouble when a pair of younger hands and feet were at her disposition. She had also her *trousseau*, bought with a little sum of money given her by Ishmael, to prepare ; and this involved much plain sewing, at which Pâquerette was not particularly expert, although she had made considerable progress since those early days when Lisbeth Benoît taught her to mend her gown, and made her a present of a thimble.

For recreation, for delight, she had the wheezy little piano, and never did a Madame Pleyel or a Liszt derive more rapture from the *chef-d'œuvre* of an Erard or a Kriegelstein than wafted Pâquerette's young soul skyward upon the cracked and tinny tones of that little worn-out cottage. Her own voice ripened and strengthened with every week of her life. It was no longer to be spoken of as that *petit brin de voix*, which might be just enough for a babyfied *patois* song. It was now a pure and fine soprano ; and Pâquerette could sing Gilda's part in the great Rigoletto quartette with a force and a passion that startled her instructress.

'You ought to come out at the opera,' said Lisette. 'It is a sin for you to marry. Artists should never marry. Marriage is almost as bad for a genius as a convent. It means self-sacrifice for life.'

'But you married,' argued Pâquerette, who saw no reason why she should not marry Ishmael first—that good Ishmael who was so kind to her—and go on the operatic stage afterwards.

'I married before I was secure of my position as an artist,' answered Lisette, 'and I have repented my weakness ever since. Moque is a good fellow, but he is a clog. I should have been at one of the boulevard theatres years ago if I had remained single.'

Madame Moque was the only person who did not cordially approve of Pâquerette's betrothal to Ishmael. She praised Ishmael's generosity in wedding the nameless waif ; but she bewailed the waif's sacrifice of an artistic career—a career which, managed and directed by her, must needs have been triumphant. Ishmael might have made a much better marriage, she urged. Pâquerette would have been happier single. But in these opinions

Madame Moque was strenuously opposed by the three Benoît girls, who came by turns to see Pâquerette, who helped in the preparation of the *trousseau*, and who were never tired of praising Ishmael, and congratulating their little friend upon her good fortune.

'If heaven would send me such a man,' said Pauline, unconsciously quoting Shakespeare.

Ishmael had made all his arrangements for his wedded life. He had descended from his eerie under the tiles to a comfortable and comparatively spacious apartment on the second floor, consisting of a *salon*, bedroom, and kitchen, with a little fourth room—a mere closet, with a narrow window commanding a back lane, which would do for his study. Pâquerette and he, accompanied by Lisette, had made numerous voyages of discovery among the second-hand dealers of Paris, and had brought home treasure in the shape of chairs, tables, and an *armoire* made under the First Empire, in that pseudo-classical style of art which has so long been a drug in the market. Ishmael, with his discriminating eye for form and mechanism, was the last person to be contented with cheap, newly-made furniture, all trick and varnish, and green wood. He wandered from broker to broker, till his glance lighted on some fine old piece of furniture wheeled into a corner, rejected by the frivolous, scorned by the fashionable, but as solid in its construction and as true in its lines as an old wooden man-of-war. And thus, for a few hundred francs, he secured some choice old pieces of cabinet-work, which gave his little *salon* a look of sombre grandeur. It in no wise resembled the prosperous workman's sitting-room. It had the air of a quiet scholar's study, a retired diplomatist's sanctum. Lisette shrugged her shoulders, and said that the room was *triste*.

'You must have yellow curtains like mine,' she protested, 'or your *salon* will be the gloomiest in all Paris.'

But Ishmael resolved that he would not have yellow curtains, least of all yellow curtains like Lisette's. He and Pâquerette took their summer evening rambles in all the faubourgs of Paris, and one night, not very remote from the dome of Sainte-Genèvieve, Ishmael found some old tapestry curtains in a shabby little *bric-à-brac* shop, which he felt were the things he wanted for his sitting-room. Pâquerette, at first, condemned them as dingy; but on their merits being explained to her, and on her being told that they exactly resembled some curtains which Ishmael had seen in a château in Brittany, she began to think better of them. Her education in the little yellow *salon* over the pork-butcher's shop was not without fruits. She was beginning to have grand ideas, vague yearnings for splendour and finery, a dim fancy that Nature had intended her to be a lady.

At last, in the golden days of early June, while the white blossoms of the chestnut trees in the Tuileries gardens were falling in feathery showers upon the grass, like snow in summer, when the hawthorns were still in bloom in the Bois, and the delicate fragrance of acacias glorified the air of the suburbs, came the morning of Pâquerette's wedding day. It was a Saturday, favourite day for humble weddings, since it leaves the interval of Sunday for the bridal party to take their pleasure before bridegroom and bride go back to the daily round of toil. Lisette had suggested Saturday, and Ishmael had obeyed. Lisette had further suggested a wedding dinner in the Palais Royal on Saturday evening, and a jaunt to Bougival, with a picnic by the water-side, on Sunday. But here, to the lady's disappointment, Ishmael announced that he had plans of his own. He had obtained leave of absence for the Monday and Tuesday after his wedding, and he meant to take Pâquerette on a little excursion to the woods of Marly and St. Germain, and then on to Fontainebleau, travelling by *diligence* as far as possible, so as to see the most they could of the country, taking their valise with them, and stopping at humble inns on the road.

'Pâquerette adores the woods,' he said. 'I have never forgotten how enchanted she was with the flowers and butterflies at Marly last year. I want to renew that experience.'

Lisette smiled a bitter smile.

'Experiences of that kind are not so easily repeated,' she said. 'I don't think Pâquerette cares very much about flowers and butterflies now she has seen the fashionable faubourgs of Paris.'

'Instead of a wedding dinner next Saturday, I shall ask you and Moque and our other friends to dine with us the Sunday after our return, and then you will be able to judge what kind of housekeeper Pâquerette will make,' pursued Ishmael, without noticing Madame Moque's interruption.

The marriage thus arranged was conducted very quietly. The only guests were the three Benoît girls, Monsieur and Madame Moque, and a fellow-workman of Ishmael's, an *esprit fort* and orator of the clubs, who acted as best man. The *mairie* on this sunlit Saturday morning was a nest of bridal parties, fathers and mothers, sisters and brothers, from youth to infancy, all in new clothes, washed, frizzed, pomaded for the occasion. The *maire* with his tricoloured scarf and little red morocco book, the *greffier* with his big register, had a formidable air, and the little crowd rose *en masse* at the entrance of these authorities. Then came solemn questions; bridegrooms and brides were each addressed by name, and formally interrogated; fathers and mothers present were questioned as to their consent to each union, the answers to be clearly and loudly given, so as to be

heard by all present, which in most cases they were not. The *greffier* read certain articles of the civil code, setting forth the duties and rights of husband and wife—all this being done with the summer wind blowing freely through wide-open doors, to show that the ceremony is a public act; and then the *maire* declared these persons united in marriage, the registers were signed, the ceremonial was finished.

'Remember the poor, if you please,' cried one of the officials; and each, as he or she went by, dropped an offering into a bag upon the table. Very microscopic some of these offerings; but they are, many of them, verily like the widow's mite, the gift of those who have but little to give.

Ishmael was too good a Catholic to dispense with the blessing of the Church on this solemn sacramental act of his life. Within half-an-hour after leaving the *mairie* Pâquerette and he were kneeling before the high altar in a shadowy old church on the edge of the eleventh *arrondissement*, and in the parish in which Ishmael had his domicile. When this solemnity was accomplished, the bridal party repaired to a quiet little restaurant near Madame Morice's shop, where the grocer and his wife met them, and where a comfortable breakfast had been ordered for the party. And here, at two o'clock, Pâquerette and her husband bade their friends adieu, and started with their modest luggage in a fly for the office of the *diligence* which still plied between Paris and Marly-le-Roi. They were to begin their wedded life in the little inn with the garden, where they had dined last St. John's day.

## CHAPTER XXI

### AND IT BROUGHT FORTH WILD GRAPES

NEARLY two years had gone by since that wedding morning at the *mairie*. It was the springtide of 1854, and Ishmael and Pâquerette had lived together through the sunshine and the cloud of a married life which seemed somewhat long to look back upon in the minds of both. It had been a period of joy and of sorrow—of joy, for Pâquerette had found it a sweet and happy fate to be the beloved of an honest and noble-minded husband; of sorrow, for the first fruits of their love had been garnered yonder in the field of many graves. Pâquerette could see the multitude of headstones, the Egyptian sarcophaguses and Greek temples, white and ghostly, on the slope of the hill when she looked out of her bedroom-window on moonlit nights; and she fancied she could see the very spot where her baby girl lay, under a little garden of flowers. For some months of Pâquerette's life she never went to bed without looking out of that window, and towards that grave, while she murmured a prayer for her dead. Not a week passed in which she did not make her pious pilgrimage to the cemetery and spend an hour beside her baby's grave. Hers were the hands that kept the flowers in order in that tiny garden, among so many other such gardens, some tawdry, some fine, in the overcrowded city of the dead. Ishmael had bought the *concession perpetuelle* of this little plot of ground. The leasehold, which suffices for middle-class Paris in a general way, was not lasting enough for his and Pâquerette's sorrow for the fair flower that had withered in its earliest bloom. They wanted to be sure that no lapse of years would make any difference to that one little bed.

The first year of Pâquerette's married life had been perfectly happy. First, there had been the delight, the pride, the importance of being mistress of her little *ménage*, her *salon* with its fine old furniture and tapestry curtains, her own piano—Ishmael's wedding gift, and a gift far beyond his means at that period—a new piano, with a full, rich tone, which was as the organ of St. Eustache in comparison with that worn-out tin kettle upon which Lisette accompanied her nasal melodies. Pâquerette adored her piano, and at Ishmael's suggestion, she took music lessons from a little old professor whose father had helped Jean Jacques Rousseau in the partition of his operettas, and had played the violin in the little theatre at Versailles

where Marie Antoinette acted. The professor was a frail old link with the historic past, faded, and withered, and snuffy; very proud of relating those *souvenirs* of the gracious days before the Revolution, which his father had bequeathed to him as his only heritage. He had discoursed of these things so often, that he had come almost to confound his father's personality with his own, and to talk as if it were he who had been in the orchestra when the Queen sang, as if he had been a collaborateur of that wonderful Jean Jacques.

'I can see it all as I tell you the story,' he would say; 'the place, the people, they are all before me, vivid, real. I knew them all so well, you see.'

Ishmael had a fancy for the little old man, who had the refinement and somewhat over-accentuated courtesy of those long departed days, an air of impalpable powder, invisible patches and pigeon wings. He asked him to dinner sometimes on a winter Sunday, and let him tell his stories all the evening. The professor was Legitimist to the tips of his nails, and held the house of Orleans and the house of Bonaparte in equal contempt.

'Charlatans both,' he said; 'only one is cleverer than the other. He is not afraid of spending money as the Citizen-King was, and he knows how to make Paris comfortable for the Parisians. And, since to govern Paris is to govern France, he is likely to reign long and merrily.'

For music Monsieur Vielbois, the little old professor, gave Pâquerette only the works of the eighteenth century composers—quaint old melodies by Rameau, Lulli, Grétry, Monsigny—gavottes, minuets, ballet music of the old, old school. These prettinesses, which did not require much execution, Pâquerette played charmingly, with airy lightness, with delicate shades of expression, with perfect phrasing.

'She has the finest ear of any pupil I ever taught,' protested Monsieur Vielbois; 'and she has a voice that would have made her fortune on the operatic stage.'

That suggestion of the 'might have been' always evoked a sigh from Pâquerette. She thought of that possible operatic career—those visionary successes and triumphs—as of a treasure she had sacrificed in order to marry Ishmael. He was very good to her. He did all he could to make her life happy, and she told herself that she was happy; but that other life shone upon her fancy somewhere in cloudland like a dream of bliss.

In the summer of 1853 Pâquerette's baby was born, a lovely infant, with eyes that had a heavenly look, which gave the father a thrill of fear as he bent over the cradle. Such a look was fitter for the skies than this dull earth—it seemed like a warning. The child lived for six months, and was the delight

of the little home. Pâquerette nursed her baby, idolized her, but treated her a little too much as a child treats her doll, and had intervals of carelessness in the midst of her devotion. One such interval occurred in the winter, when the snow was on the roofs of Ménilmontant, and the graves in Père Lachaise were hidden under one great white pall. Monsieur Vielbois brought his pupil tickets for the opera when the houses were thin on account of the hard weather. And Pâquerette, flurried and feverish all day in anticipation of the evening's bliss, hurried off to the Rue le Peletier at night with one of the Benoît girls, leaving the baby in her cradle to the chance ministrations of a friendly neighbour on the third floor.

One such night the little one caught cold—a mere nothing—a baby ailment—a touch of fever, the apothecary said, which a powder and a *tisane* would set right. But before Paris and the world were twenty-four hours older, the fever was a raging fever, the delicate little frame was attacked with mortal disease, and within a week the little coffin was being made, and the cradle was a place of stillness, shrouded under white cambric.

Pâquerette grieved intensely—lamented passionately—would not be comforted. When the frosts and snows of January were over, Ishmael sent her to Fontainebleau with one of the Benoît girls, hoping that change of air and scene would restore her to peace of mind, and give her the healthful sleep which had forsaken her pillow since the child's death. The change did something, and time did more; and now the year was wearing on which had been a new year while the earth was fresh above baby Claire's grave. Ishmael had named the child Claire, after his father's mother, whom he had only known as a tradition. He shrank from calling her by his own mother's name. It would have seemed an evil omen.

Pâquerette was not a good housekeeper. She was impulsive, a creature of whim and fancy, did things by fits and starts, sometimes working tremendously, sometimes abandoning herself to idleness for days together.

Ishmael was at his work all day, and asked no troublesome questions when he came home in the evening so long as Pâquerette was there to receive him. He was careless as to what he ate, and took a good or a bad dinner with equable indifference. Sometimes the dinner was a cold collation, something fetched hurriedly from the *charcutier's* at the last moment, Pâquerette having forgotten the dinner question altogether. Sometimes there was a decent *pot-au-feu*.

She employed a charwoman, the deaf old portress who kept the door below, who came to the second floor every morning to do all the rough work, so that Pâquerette's hands were never

roughened by domestic drudgery. Her husband admired those pretty white hands.

'You must have good blood in your veins,' he said: 'you have the hands and feet of a patrician.'

Pâquerette gave her head a little toss.

'I have a conviction that my father was a gentleman,' she said; 'and that was why he would not own me.'

'If he was alive, and knew of your existence, and abandoned you to that den yonder, he was a scoundrel, whatever his birth might be,' answered Ishmael, warmly.

He had a knack of calling things by their right names.

'Ah! you don't know; he may have been some great person, hemmed round with difficulties—a tyrannic father, a proud mother. Who knows?'

Pâquerette had read plenty of novels in her long hours of leisure, the novels of the day—George Sand, Feydeau, Sue, Dumas, father and son. Her little head was stuffed with the romantic and impossible side of life. She despised Ishmael's dry-as-dust studies, far away from the flowery fields of sentiment and poetry. So different from his friend, Hector de Valnois, lately returned to Paris, and full of interest in Pâquerette, whom he found wondrously improved and refined by an education which had consisted for the most part of music-lessons and novel-reading. Pâquerette was fascinated with his sympathetic nature, his delightful way of looking at everything from the standpoint of art and beauty. She knew that her husband was clever; but his was a kind of cleverness upon which she set no value—a cleverness which made bridges, and built markets and slaughter-houses, and drained cities through loathsome subterraneous sewers. What was such talent as his compared with the genius which could extemporise a song, words and music, and sing it divinely *en passant*—which could embody jest and fancy with the delicate lines of an airy pencil? Wit, mirth, art, comedy, tragedy, music, song, were all within the domain of Hector de Valnois; while Ishmael was distinguished only by an inordinate passion for hard work, a love of sheer drudgery, which seemed almost a mania.

What society could such a husband afford to a young wife eager for new pleasures now that the anguish of a first grief was a pain of the past, a sad, thrilling memory? Ishmael grudged his wife no indulgence, thwarted her in no whim. But he could rarely share her pleasures. His days were full of toil, thought, anxiety. He had prospered beyond his most ardent hopes. He was the head and front of all things in the builder's yard at Belleville, that yard which he entered less than four years ago as a *gâcheur*. There was a talk of his being taken into

partnership—a well-deserved reward, since it was his enterprise, his strength of character, and thorough mastery of the science of construction which had obtained for the house an important Government contract for the repair of the slaughter-houses at Belleville, Ménilmontant, and Villette—a contract which brought renown and position to the firm. It was a small thing, perhaps, if set against the works of a Peto or a Brassey ; but it was the largest business the Belleville yard had ever had yet, and it scored high for Ishmael. There was the hope, too, that if ever the Imperial idea of a great central cattle-market and slaughter-house in direct communication with all the railways should come to be realized, Ishmael's firm would have a share in the work.

With increasing success came ever-increasing labour, plans, estimates, quantities, the whole science of mathematics as applied to iron and stone ; and when the long day of practical work was over, it was Ishmael's custom, after a brief interval of rest, to shut himself in his little study, the hermit-like cell opening out of his bedroom, and there to devote himself to figures and theory, sometimes working on till late in the night.

'It is not very lively,' Pâquerette said, sometimes, with a shrug of her shoulders, when she spoke to Lisette Moque of her domestic life.

Lisette was the only person to whom she could safely grumble. The Benoît girls thought her lot all sunshine, and would have resented a murmur as a kind of treason. They were always praising Ishmael and the happy little home, so superior to other homes, so peaceful, so secure. They came about once a month to a Sunday dinner, and these occasions, Monsieur Vielbois, the little antique professor, assisting, had quite a family air. To Ishmael they were delightful—a respite from labour and calculation, a lull in the daily tumult, a glimpse of domesticity and affection. But after two years of married life, Pâquerette began to find that there was a sameness. Those simple pleasures palled on her impatient young spirit. The long empty days gave her too much time for thought, since, after the baby's death, thought with Pâquerette only meant thinking about herself, her own pleasures, her own woes, the possibilities near and remote of her own life. She wasted very little of her thinking power upon Ishmael, considering him only as a person who went out in the morning and came home in the evening, who wanted to see the apartment neatly kept, and who must have dinner of some kind provided for him. From the early morning hours till dusk Pâquerette had ample leisure for self-communing, for feeling the burden of the hours, pining for pleasures that were never likely to come in her way, regretting that fate had not made her——

what? She hardly knew what she would have chosen for her lot had the wheel of fortune been put into her hands with power to stop it at whatever number she pleased. She would have liked to be something public and distinguished, a creature admired and beloved by all Paris, pointed at as she drove by, applauded almost to madness every night upon that vast stage of the opera house, where she had seen the audience thrilled and hushed in a charmed silence, breathless almost, while Bosio poured forth the wealth of her noble voice in 'Lucrezia' or 'Fidelio.' She would have liked to be a great singer, *the* great singer of the age. Or, failing that, it must be sweet to be a famous beauty, a golden-haired divinity, like that fashionable enchantress whom she had seen often on the Boulevards and in the Champs-Elysées—a mignon face, a figure delicate to fragility, almost buried amidst the luxury of a matchless set of sables, seated in the lightest and most elegant of victorias, behind a pair of thoroughbred blacks. She knew scarcely more than the name of this divinity, which seemed like the name of a poem—Zanita. Monsieur de Valnois laughed when she questioned him about Zanita. The little old professor frowned and shook his head.

'*Ces espèces* are the avenging angels of those good women who were murdered in the Terror,' he said once. 'Those butchers of Ninety-three wanted a world without princesses and queens; and what have revolutions and changes of dynasty given us instead of the great ladies of France? Zanita and her sisters—a pestilence to decimate the city—a gulf of iniquity in which men are swallowed up alive, with their fortunes, their lands, their lives, their honour, their names even.'

The old professor was pale with indignation as he spoke of the fair, frail, golden-haired divinity, distinguishable chiefly to the outer world by her diamonds, her sables, her horses, and her hotel: known best to the initiated by her epigrams, *à gros sel*. She was a kind of Undine-like creature, springing none knew whence unless it were from the gutter. Her very country was unknown. Some said she was English, some declared she was American. Her French was the language of the Faubourg du Temple, garnished with the graces of the Quartier Bréda. She confessed to neither country nor kindred. She had begun her career as an orphan, but, on becoming a celebrity, she discovered that her establishment would not be complete without the maternal element, so she had mothers at her desire, always kept one on the premises, and flung her out of doors when she became troublesome. These *mères postiches* had a knack of taking to the bottle.

Pâquerette, seeing this life of fine clothes and thoroughbred horses from the outside, fancied it a kind of earthly paradise

and thought that, next to being Bosio, she would like to be Zanita. She confessed as much once naïvely to Hector de Valnois, who sometimes called at his friend Ishmael's lodgings at dusk before he went to his evening's amusements.

'My child, you have some of the qualities of the *métier*,' he answered, smiling at her—'the nameless, indescribable graces which go further than beauty. But it is too late; such a career as Zanita's must begin almost from the cradle. That fine flower of wit which fascinates and enchains Paris requires a particular hotbed for its development. No, Madame Ishmael, the stage is the arena for your attractions—a little song, a short petticoat, and, my faith, the town would be at your feet.'

'I shall never be allowed to sing that song,' cried Pâquerette, discontentedly. 'I suppose I am to be buried alive all my days in this dull, common-place room, staring at those everlasting sphinxes.'

She looked almost vindictively at that *garniture de cheminee* which had once seemed to her a thing of beauty and the pride of life. It was of true Empire style—a black marble dial with gold hands, supported upon two massive bronze sphinxes, another bronze sphinx at each end of the chimney-piece supporting a brazen candelabrum. In her moods of depression Pâquerette loathed those four sphinxes. She could not get out of the reach of their glacial metallic gaze. At such moments the sound of Hector de Valnois' step on the stair fluttered her pulses and stirred her heart with a sense of relief that was akin to rapture.

It meant the coming of youth, hope, gaiety, news of the outer world. It meant laughter, and life, and gladness.

## CHAPTER XXII

### 'HOW WEAK IS THINE HEART!'

WHILE Ishmael was plodding steadily on at his trade, which seemed to Pâquerette so dull and ponderous a business, that to think about it made her head ache, his friend of the Rue Montorgueil was in high feather. Everything had prospered with Hector de Valnois since his return from that wander-year of his in the land of the Rhine and the Moselle, and amidst the pine-clad steeps of Tyrol. That time of wandering and poetic fancy, of desultory study and primeval innocence, had renewed his strength of mind and body. His father was dead, and he had inherited his little domain in the South; and was selling the patrimonial acres piece by piece, feeling that he had another estate in his brains—infinite, inexhaustible. He came back to Paris like a lion refreshed, like a young Samson whose shorn locks had grown again, and who felt within him the power to overthrow the temples of the Philistines. Some of the articles about pictures, music, the drama, which he wrote at that period, were signed 'Samson, junior'; and he brought down the roof of many a Philistine temple, as represented by good, old, high-dried literary or artistic reputation. He cast in his lot with the young, the original, the untried, the spontaneous. He made fierce war against established renown. 'Because a man wrote a good book thirty years ago, are we to bow down and worship him for the bad book he writes to-day?' he asked. 'His books have been getting worse and worse every year, perhaps, and we have been wilfully blind to his decadence, adoring a tradition.'

He wrote savagely often, but with a playful lightness, which gave a zest to his ferocity. His articles were full of variety, the man himself being a creature of many moods. He was in no wise a genius. He was imitative and receptive rather than original; but his power of imitation, his exquisite facility of appropriation, passed for spontaneous fire. Every new book he read gave him a fresh impetus. His style had all the charms, all the blemishes of youth; but such as it was, his style pleased, and he was able at this time to earn an income which, if administered with care and frugality, would have left a surplus for laying by, but which, handled with supreme carelessness, enabled him to live as a prince in the Bohemia of Imperial Paris.

He had exchanged his dingy apartment in the Rue Montorgueil

for an *entresol* in a fine old house in the Rue de Grenelle, a house which in the days of Louis Quinze and Madame du Barry had belonged to one of the magnates of Paris, a Prince of the Church. The stately reception rooms on the floor above Hector's nest were panelled, and the panels—painted with no mean art—were reversible. On one side appeared innocent landscapes and flower pieces, humming-birds, butterflies; but, touch a spring, and *crac!* each panel revolved on a swivel, and lo! the Cardinal's *salon* was glorified by a series of mythological subjects, which sailed somewhat too near the wind to be seen by the uninitiated. In the glare of daylight, when the doors were open and all the great world of Paris had the right of *entrée* in those splendid rooms, the Prince of the Church appeared in his violet *soutane*, a solemn, stately figure, against a background of birds, and butterflies, and Arcadian vales and fountains; but at night, when the curtains were drawn and the doors were shut, and the wax candles in the silver sconces were lighted, and the tables were laid for the little supper, and the Duc de Richelieu and other choice spirits were expected, then Leda, and Danae, and Latona, and Semele came out of the darkness and smiled upon the orgie.

Hector's *entresol* consisted of four little low rooms opening one out of the other, like Chinese puzzle boxes. They were very snug little rooms; and though to an English mind they would have suggested stuffiness and everything unhealthy, no such objections presented themselves to a Frenchman.

Flushed with the success which had of late crowned his literary work, most of all by the vogue of his last *vaudeville* at the Palais Royal—*Un Mari en Vacance*—Valnois had furnished this miniature abode of his without counting the cost—all the more easily as he had so far neither paid for anything, nor even looked at the upholsterer's or the *bric-à-brac* dealer's invoices. The rooms were decorated and furnished with a dainty elegance—a lightness, brightness, and luxurious puffiness and downiness of upholstery which savoured of the *petit maitre*, or even of the *petite dame du Quartier Breda*. The chairs were of the *pouf* species, covered with crimson satin; the *guéridons* were of that graceful Louis Seize style which the Empress had lately brought into fashion by her quest of Marie Antoinette relics. Barbedienne bronzes and Oriental jars, choice books in still choicer bindings, miniatures set in turquoise velvet, rare etchings of doubtful subjects adorned the walls. The *garniture de cheminée* was in sea-green Sèvres that had belonged to Madame Récamier. The *portières* were of old Gobelins tapestry which were supposed to have once screened the sanctuaries of Luciennes, and muffled the sound of Royal speech and Royal laughter from the ears of the *valetaille* in the antechamber. In a word, Monsieur de

Valnois was now lodged as a poet, wit, playwright, and art critic—an authority on the beautiful—should be lodged, according to the eternal fitness of things, whatever might be the ultimate result to the tradesmen who had supplied the goods.

But it was not alone as the joint author of *Un Mari en Vacance* that Hector de Valnois was known to the Parisian public. He had lately published *Mes Nuits Blanches*, a volume of short poems —the jetsam and flotsam of his desultory youth, the concentrated expression of long days of idleness, long nights of unrest—the passionate cries of the young unchastened heart, so fierce in its longings, so vague in the midst of its intensity, so inconstant even at fever-point. Love, unbelief, the sickly envy of the poor and the badly placed against the rich and the renowned, the barren ambition of the dreamer, all found their expression in this little book. The Muses are the father-confessors of unhappy youth: and to the Muses Hector de Valnois had revealed the darkest depths of his heart and mind. The result was piquant; the book was a success. All the critics praised, abused, condemned, applauded in a breath. Two poems, a page long, were quoted in almost every review. One—*Gethsemane*—was blasphemous to audacity. The other—*Cleopatra*—belonged to the order of composition which ought to be burned by the public hangman. But as both had a certain weird power, and were perfect in versification, Hector de Valnois' reputation as one of the coming men was an accomplished fact. Unhappily, there are so many of those coming men who never arrive at the goal, who join the dismal ranks of the *Râtés*, the men who have missed fire, who die in early middle-age *roué au vert*, perhaps—brain softened, limbs tremulous, the man himself numbered among the dead ever so long before the *pompes funèbres* send their hearse to carry him to the *tranchée gratuite* yonder in the cemetery where he once dreamed his tomb would rank with that of Abelard and Héloïse.

Hector's head was not turned by this favouring gale. He had always believed in himself; and he was in no wise surprised that the world called him a genius. He wore his laurels modestly enough, as a matter of course: and he had his hats from the best maker in Paris. He abandoned his Bohemian style of dress for a more fashionable attire; but there was even yet a touch of unconventionality about his costume—a faint flavour of the student's quarter, the shabby thoroughfares of the *rive gauche* in the vicinity of the Sorbonne, the highway of youthful footsteps, the place of cafés, and billiard tables, and political clubs, and concert-cellars, and the fervour and madness of student-life in general.

Hector loved the Rue de Grenelle for two reasons: first,

because of its old-world air, its grave and grandiose mansions, its glimpses of stately town garden—paradise of stonework and evergreens—its elegant seclusion, its aristocratic repose—every other house looking as if it were the abode of an ambassador or a minister of state; secondly, because it was within a few minutes' walk of some of the queerest old streets in Paris, and of the Luxembourg, and of the Art Schools. He had graduated in the Quartier Latin before he went to Heidelberg to take the degree he had failed to get in Paris at a German university. The wildest nights of his wild youth had been spent in some of those underground dens, those haunts where the music was as vile as the liquor, the company viler than either, and where, all the same, youth fancied itself in a privileged atmosphere, and gloried in the idea of seeing life.

The taste for these underground concerts had left him. He had no inclination to revisit Les Ecossaisses, or to renew his acquaintance with the Salamander, alias Crocodile, nor the Bas-Rhin, which a few years later was to be made famous by the feat of *Nini la Démocrate*, who, for a wager with a rival celebrity, *Helène la Sévère*, drank fifty-five *bocks* in a single evening. Feats of a similar nature, though on a scale less lofty, had been performed even in Hector's time; and the houris who ministered to the revellers in these Circean haunts were chiefly distinguished for the number of glasses which they themselves could consume.

Hector no longer relished these underground orgies, but he had still a liking for the Quartier Latin, as for a friend of his youth; and he played billiards and talked politics, drama, art, and literature in one or other of the larger cafés three or four times a week. He had not forsaken any of his old friends on the strength of his new fame, least of all had he forsaken Pâquerette.

'You are a great man now, and we shall never see you any more,' she said, pouting a little with lips that were rosier than of yore when he showed her some of the reviews of his book.

'You will see me only so much the oftener if I am prosperous and happy,' he said, smiling at her, smiling with a light in his eyes which meant so much more than she could read, and which thrilled her with a sense of mystery. 'I shall come to you for inspiration: I never feel so full of ideas as when I have been spending an hour of happy idleness in this room of sphinxes.'

'Oh, those sphinxes!' exclaimed Pâquerette, with an impatient shrug. 'How I detest them!'

'I adore them. Chief sphinx of the sphinxes, most mysterious among the mysteries, is the sphinx who walks, and talks, and has dreamy blue eyes. I never fathom what *that* sphinx means. *Her* riddle is unguessable; and yet I cherish a hope that I shall guess it some day, and that the answer will mean bliss unspeakable.'

'I wish you would not talk such unmeaning nonsense,' said Pâquerette, walking to the window with affected petulance.

She hardly knew what he did mean, but she knew that she was trembling—trembling so that she needed to lean against the window frame for support, pretending to be looking out into the dull, silent street, pretending to be interested in emptiness and nobody, which was all that was afforded by the prospect below her.

'Are you going to the Opera to-night? "Rigoletto"—with Ronconi, Mario—his last season, remember, and a new soprano.'

'You know I adore "Rigoletto." But you talk such nonsense. How can I go?'

'Nothing more easy. You can go with Madame Moque.'

'You have tickets that you can spare?'

'I have a tiny box on the upper tier, which will just hold two people comfortably and a third uncomfortably. You and Madame Moque shall have the two comfortable seats, and I will look in for a few minutes in the evening.'

'But you forget: Madame Moque has to sing at the Cristal.'

'True,' said Hector; 'there is a difficulty. I suppose you could hardly go alone?'

'Impossible; Ishmael would be angry.'

'And your demoiselles Benoît—no, they have a puritanical air that would spoil our evening,' muttered Hector, who had discovered some little time ago that the Benoît girls were suspicious of his relations with Pâquerette.

Pâquerette had her grief against her old friends too, for big Lisbeth had taken her to task one evening after finding Monsieur de Valnois sitting at her piano in the dusk, and had told her in very plain language that the acquaintance of an agreeable idler of superior station and culture was not good for any young wife.

'If Ishmael likes Monsieur Valnois, and does not mind his coming to see us, why should you find fault?' asked Pâquerette.

'I know what women are made of better than Monsieur Ishmael does,' answered Lisbeth, bluntly. 'No doubt he thinks you are an angel, and that you spend all the hours of his absence in thinking of him and praying for him. Do you think it would gratify him to know that you are listening to Monsieur Valnois' songs or, watching Monsieur Valnois draw caricatures?'

'My life is dull enough, even counting that relief,' said Pâquerette, impatiently.

'Your life was duller in the Rue Sombreuil, where you were beaten and half starved,' retorted Lisbeth, measuring her from head to foot with a look of cold contempt—a judicial look, which weighed her in the balance and found her wanting.

She could not conceal her scorn for this weak nature—too weak even for gratitude, the virtue of the humble-minded; too weak for constancy; too weak for honour. Lisbeth left the house without a word of adieu. She was too angry with Pâquerette for further speech. To have spoken any more would have been to open the floodgates of wrath long held in check. She, who so honoured Ishmael, was enraged at seeing how little his wife appreciated him. She shrugged her shoulders and sighed heavily as she walked away from the quiet street at Ménilmontant.

The Benoît girls from that hour became, in the mind of Pâquerette, persons to be avoided. She left off inviting them on Sundays, and made feeble excuses when her husband asked why they so seldom appeared in his home. He was too busy to be curious about trifles—busy with head and hands, weighted with the serious responsibilities of a growing trade, in which the master was a cipher as compared with the foreman.

No; the Opera would lose half its delight if she were to go there under the severe eye of Lisbeth, or the keen, suspicious glances of Pauline, or Toinette.

'Could you not go alone, and let your husband suppose you under Madame Moque's custody? We might invent a *relâche* at the Cristal,' suggested Hector, quite assured of Pâquerette's longing to occupy a place in that little box on the uppermost tier.

'Oh, but to deceive him!' cried Pâquerette, reddening with shame.

'What would it matter? There could be no harm in your going to the Opera—with me. You would be as safe as with Ishmael himself. But I can see the way to a compromise. Madame Moque only sings once in the evening—her great song, *La Cuisinière d'en face*. She sings at nine o'clock. When her song is over, she has only to put on her bonnet and shawl and come on to join you at the Opera. She can escort you home afterwards; and etiquette and Ishmael will be satisfied.'

Pâquerette hesitated.

'And I should have to go to the Opera alone,' she said.

'What of that? Dress yourself plainly; take your ticket in your hand. You have only to present it, and you will be ushered into the box, where you can sit as quietly and as safely as if you were at mass.'

Pâquerette was a little frightened at the scheme. She had never been to the theatre or Opera alone; never without Ishmael's full consent and approval. He had usually gone to meet her and her companion—had been waiting in front of the playhouse when they came out. She had never yet gone to a

theatre with Monsieur de Valnois. It was the first time he had suggested such a thing; and it seemed natural that he should give her this opportunity of hearing 'Rigoletto,' remembering the second time they met—in the artists' room at the Cristal—and how he had talked to her about the new opera.

She hurried off to the Rue Franch-colline, and after some persuasion, obtained Madame Moque's promise to join her at the Opera after she had sung her grand *cuisinière* song, which she performed in character, with a white apron, bare arms, and a floury countenance. She would change her stage attire for a black silk gown and cashmere shawl with briefest delay, take a cab and drive to the opera house. She would be there before ten, in time for the quartette. Madame Moque, in her heart of hearts, cared not a straw for the quartette, which she had heard murdered so often at her concert-hall; but she thought it very likely that Monsieur de Valnois would take them over to Tortoni's and treat them to ices after the performance; or he might, perhaps, go so far as to offer them a little supper at the *Maison Dorée*. The boulevard at midnight was Lisette's highest idea of Paradise. And for Ishmael! He would be sleeping the sleep of the industrious workman, and need never be told whether his wife went home early or late.

Ishmael was later than usual that evening. Pâquerette had prepared his dinner with more than her accustomed care. She had the table laid and everything ready at half-past six; and then, finding that her husband did not return, she went to her room to dress. She had no inclination to dine alone—could not have eaten anything even if her husband had been sitting opposite to her. She was feverish with expectation of pleasure, and with vague fears. Her hands trembled a little as she dressed herself in her pretty gray merino gown, her straw bonnet lined with pale pink plush, setting off the milky skin, lighting up the large blue eyes. She had a cashmere shawl—a real cashmere, which had cost five hundred francs, Ishmael's last gift. Her gloves, her boots, were perfect after their kind. She felt that she might stand before kings and be not afraid. Those fingers of hers, once so unskilled, had grown clever and deft enough now in the manufacture of pretty things for her own adornment. Her gowns and her bonnets were the chief labour of Pâquerette's life. Her husband liked to see her prettily dressed—her grace and beauty gladdened his eye; and he never asked how much money she spent on the raw material. He thought her a model of good sense and economy because she made her own gowns.

When she was ready and had given a last look at her image in the glass—a lily-face flushed with faint reflections of rose

colour, she sat down hurriedly at Ishmael's *secretaire* and wrote him a little note. She was going to the Italian Opera with Madame Moque to hear 'Rigoletto'—he knew how she had always longed to hear that divine opera—and Madame Moque would bring her home. She hoped he would not be angry, and that the beef would be good. He would only have to take the soup and the *bouilli* out of the saucepan when he wanted it.

She put the note on the dinner table, left the beef simmering on the stove, and tripped away—tripped with light foot along the road so many have travelled before her; the beaten track of sin, which begins in softness and verdure, between flowery banks, amidst the song of birds and the scent of roses, and which ends in a pathway of shards and ashes hemmed in with hedges of thorn and briar.

She was a little afraid of going into the theatre alone even furnished with the box ticket which Hector had given her; but she was spared this difficulty, for as she turned into the Place Ventadour, she almost ran into Valnois' arms.

'I found I could get here early,' he said, and they went into the big, grand-looking opera house together, Pâquerette looking about her as they went along, flushed and breathless.

A great crash of drums and brass came from the orchestra like a judgment peal as they were going upstairs, and it scared Pâquerette almost as if it had been the last trump.

It was a long way to ascend. They went past the *foyer* with its gilded pillars and many mirrors—past corridor after corridor, were jostled by men and women in evening dress, until at last they came to the little box on the topmost tier. Then, as Pâquerette drew aside the curtain and looked out, the glory and the splendour of the vast theatre burst upon her in a blaze of light, and colour, and diamonds, and beautiful women. It was a fashionable night in the early days of the Empire. Yes, that was the Empress yonder in all her gracious beauty, fair as a lily, and with that coronal of golden hair which was a new and lovely image in the eyes of men, for it had not yet been degraded and vulgarised by tawdry imitations. She was dressed in white, with a diamond cross upon her neck, and a string of pearls in her hair, the most simply-dressed woman in all that vast assembly. The age of inordinate luxury in dress had begun, and silks and velvets, and diamonds, plumes and flowers made a dazzle and confusion of colour in the intense light of the place. It seemed to Pâquerette as if every man in the house wore a star upon his breast, as if every woman had a diamond necklace. The overture was hurrying to the grand crescendo of the close, but she only heard the music as in a dream. That spectacle of

the crowded audience absorbed and mastered all her senses. She was nothing but eyes.

Presently the curtain rose, her spirits grew calmer, and her love of music, which was a passion, regained the ascendant. She forgot the diamonds, the loveliness, the sheen and shimmer of velvet and silk in yonder dazzling semi-circle, and she concentrated her attention on the stage and the singers. Hector sat behind her quite in shadow, his arm resting on the back of her chair, his head leaning forward a little, so that his chin almost touched her shoulder, and the perfume of his hair was in her nostrils. They were as much alone in the great crowded theatre as if they had been in one of the glades of Fontainebleau. Later, in the second act, when the tragic interest of the stage had deepened, when there was a hush in the darkened house, Pâquerette found that they two were sitting hand in hand like acknowledged lovers. She knew not when he had taken her hand in his, but she did not try to withdraw from that firm and fervent clasp. She lifted her eyes to his presently, in the half-darkness, and in that meeting of impassioned eyes there was a full confession. Prevarication, denial after that, would have been worse than useless. The secret, which had been no secret to him for the last six weeks, was told at once and for ever. From that moment she surrendered herself to the sweetness of her sin. She never pretended to be true to her husband, or to fight the good fight. The little hand lay in his like the pebble in the brook ; the mournful eyes looked into his, full of the love which for such weak souls as hers means fatality.

A knock at the box door startled them like a voice from the dead.

'Who can it be?' faltered Pâquerette, starting to her feet.

'Madame Moque, perhaps,' suggested Hector, whose nerves were not quite so highly strung as those of his companion.

'Madame Moque—yes, I had forgotten,' murmured Pâquerette, as she opened the door.

It was the lively Lisette, bustling, breathless, eager, with powdery complexion and bright black eyes, set off by cheeks of vivid bloom. Her cashmere shawl was plastered across her chest in the last fashionable style, and she made a great display of bonnet strings.

'You must have wondered what had become of me,' she exclaimed as she planted herself in front of the box, took her *lorgnette*, and began a general scrutiny of the audience.

'Is it late?' Pâquerette asked, innocently.

'Is it late? Nearly eleven. I thought I should never get away from that *taudis* yonder. The people would have the *Cuisinière* over again, and then they called for *Elle se mouche*

*trop.* I thought I should never get away. There is the Duchesse Vieille-Roche, and the Vicomtesse Lis-Fané. What a house! And there, yes, it is——'

'Don't excite yourself,' interjected Hector, as Madame Moque squared her elbows and directed her *lorgnette* at a box on the pit tier as if she had been taking aim with a gun.

'Zanita!' exclaimed Madame Moque.

Hector's eyes followed the direction of the *lorgnette*, and Pâquerette looked over his shoulder. He put his arm round her to draw her into the right position for seeing that central box at the bottom of the theatre—a large box, very open, very much *en evidence*—crowded with men whose breasts glittered with orders like a court in miniature. A woman sat in the midst, lolling back in her chair, fanning herself languidly—a woman of girlish, or even child-like aspect, very fair, very slender, with hair lighter and less golden than the Empress's, arranged loosely, fluffily, above the small head, with diamonds gleaming here and there amidst the feathery pile. This was Zanita—the woman who was said to have graduated in the gutter somewhere by the Boulevard de la Chapelle, to have drunk the cup of degradation to the dregs, before she became the rage of Paris.

She, like the Empress, was simply dressed. These great reputations are not sustained by common finery. She wore a white frock, like a schoolgirl's, cut very low upon the milk-white shoulders, revealing the full length of the slim, beautifully-rounded arm; but as she turned suddenly to address one of her court, Pâquerette saw a coruscation of white light flash from her neck like electric fire, and for the first time perceived that the slender throat was encircled by a diamond necklace, which, for brilliancy, outshone all other gems in the crowded house.

'What an innocent look the viper has!' said Hector, when he had gazed his fill.

'Why do you call her a viper? Is she so very wicked?' asked Pâquerette, still looking at the slim, supple figure—the *petit museau chiffonné* which was hardly to be called beauty, the careless feathery hair, and simple China crape gown.

'She has slain more people than any assassin who was ever sent to the guillotine or the galleys; she has done more cruel things than St. Arnaud when he roasted the Arabs in a cave; she has ruined more families than any fraudulent banker in England, where they grow that kind of thing to perfection. Fathers and mothers, sisters and brothers, have cursed her name. She has peopled the Morgue with its most distinguished lodgers. She is a pestilence—a smiling, sparkling, amusing scourge. If she were to ask me to supper to-night, I should go, and laugh at her jokes, and admire her Sèvres china, and hob-nob

with the princes and ambassadors who are her playfellows. I should come away abusing her; but I should go all the same. She is like *absinthe*, which everybody drinks nowadays. She is a vice, and she means death; but the vice is a pleasant vice, and nobody counts the cost.'

Pâquerette felt a pang of jealousy as he spoke.

'Promise me that you will never go to her house—never!' she said, eagerly, drawing closer to him, claiming him as her own by the pretty vehemence of her air, the look in her eyes, which seemed to say, 'You are mine, and she shall not have you.'

'She is not very likely to ask me,' he answered; 'and if she were to ask, you have but to say, Do not go,' he added, in a tenderer voice. 'I am your slave from this night. I obey you in all things henceforth. Love has no meaning if it does not mean obedience.'

His voice was so low, that only the ears of love could have heard him, but it was loud enough for Pâquerette. Madame Moque was of no consequence, and her head was half out of the box as she directed her *lorgnette* from group to group, and finally settled down in a deliberate contemplation of the Empress.

And now the quartette began, and Pâquerette thrilled at the sound of those familiar chords.

'Do you remember the night you first heard this?' asked Hector.

She gave a faint sigh, which meant yes.

'So do I,' he whispered. 'I told myself that night we were created for each other. Fate has come between us since then; but my instinct was true all the same'

## CHAPTER XXIII

### 'AS A BIRD THAT WANDERETH FROM HER NEST'

An offer of supper at the Maison Dorée, or the Restaurant Vachette, was made, as Lisette had anticipated, but Pâquerette refused, much to her chaperon's vexation.

'Indeed, I could not eat anything,' she protested, when Hector pressed the point, suggesting the Passage Jouffroy, if they did not like the full glare of the boulevard, or even the Palais Royal, though that was out of the way; or they might go to Philippe's—the Rocher de Cancale, quietest and most classic of haunts, in his own old neighbourhood, the Rue Montorgueil.

Pâquerette thought it was cruel to talk of supper when her nerves were strung to their utmost tension, when she seemed walking in a new, strange world, and upon pavements that were made of air, and had no more idea of ever being hungry or thirsty again than a sylph has.

'It is the very hour for Tortoni's,' said Hector, when he had run the gamut of the restaurants as best known to *gandin* and Bohemian. 'You shall at least take an ice.'

He led them across the boulevard in the midst of horses and carriages, and they went to an upstairs room at the famous confectioner's where, forty years before, when Tortoni's was a rendezvous for statesmen and princes, wits and authors, Spolar, the crack billiard player of the first Empire, used to exhibit his skill to the delight of such men as Talleyrand and Montrond, and where the head waiter, Prévost, wore hair powder, and combined the manners of Versailles and Marly with an equivocal dexterity in the art of giving deficient change.

The windows were open to the balcony, and Pâquerette could see the lights and bustle of the boulevard—carriages pulling up in front of the *perron*, beauty and fashion alighting, with garments blown by the chill March wind. It was a clear spring night—stars shining, moon rising above the house-tops yonder, Paris all alive with the sound of voices, the hurrying to and fro of feet. There was an excitement in the very air men breathed just now, for the rumour of an impending war grew louder every day. The Bourse was in a ferment, and that great question as to the custody and ownership of the keys of the Holy Places, the subterranean shrines and churches of Bethlehem and Gethsemane, which had long been agitating clerical circles, had taken a new

development and meant a great war in which France and England, the old enemies of Crécy and Waterloo, the hereditary foes of six hundred years, were to fight shoulder to shoulder against the northern foe.

The alliance was popular, the war was popular, and the sons of Gaul were flushed and glad with the prospect of the strife.

Perhaps Paris had never been in better spirits than at this period of her history. Those early years of the second Empire had been a time of golden harvests, of wonderful fortunes, wonderfully and fearfully made. It was a day of speculation, of estates and reputations staked upon the hazards of the Stock Exchange. The demon of chance had set his claw in the hearts of men and women of every class and of every rank. Workmen sold their furniture, wives robbed their husbands, clerks embezzled their employers' money, to stake it at the great national gambling house. They crowded the gates of the temple, they thronged the pavements. From afar even, from quiet townships and villages, the people brought their savings of long years to stake them on the last new enterprise which promised the highest percentage. Of those who lost their all in this wild game Paris had heard very little: for them she shed no tear; but she could point triumphantly to the men who had made their fortunes—men whose spotless primrose gloves covered hands which had lately known no cover save the pockets of a shabby overcoat. Varnished boots shone upon feet that had but now been slipshod; whitest cuffs were worn by some with whom a shirt was once an uncertainty; overcoats broke out into collars and linings of velvet or satin; and the unknown citizen of yesterday was to-day the patron of the arts, the purchaser of cashmere shawls at ten thousand francs, and dragon jars from the spoils of an Imperial palace.

Napoleon the Third had not disappointed the hopes of those tradesmen of Paris who looked forward to a new Empire as a millennium for the upholsterer and the jeweller, the milliner and the coachbuilder. The Emperor did all in his power, both by precept and example, to encourage lavish expenditure. It was his hand which set the ball rolling that has never stopped since then, despite the preaching of moralists, the failure of banks, the ruin of innumerable weaklings tempted by the universal example to an expenditure beyond their means. The expenditure did good in its day; the possessors of these suddenly-acquired fortunes gave a new impetus to art and commerce, stimulated invention, fostered genius. The streets of Paris were glorified by the splendours of the newly rich, the extravagant outlay of men and women to whom it was rapture to wallow in gold, to waste, to spend, to give even, though that

pleasure is tamer. Never before were such carriages and horses seen as those which gave life and motion to the scenic beauty of the Champs-Elysées and the Bois de Boulogne, a new creation of park and *parterre* which was gradually being developed from the woodland simplicity of an uncultivated landscape.

The Emperor was keeping pace with the electric eagerness of his subjects. New markets, new boulevards, new bridges were in progress, works of Augustan grandeur. Already the dens and alleys of old Paris were being marked for destruction. Might not this usurper by-and-by paraphrase the boast of the Roman, and say that he had found Paris a city of slums, and that he left her a city of palaces?

Nothing could surpass the success, the popularity of the Imperial rule in those days. It was the honeymoon of France and the Emperor. The French love a new Government, and this Empire of wealth and splendour, this Government of men in varnished boots, this era of money-making and money-spending, was the very ideal *régime* of the Parisian *bourgeoisie;* and as Paris is France, and as the *bourgeois* is the most important factor in Parisian politics, the Emperor had the nation at his feet.

It was upon this glorified Paris that Pâquerette looked out in the March midnight, between lamplight and starshine. The theatres had disgorged their crowds, the cafés on the boulevard were at their apogee. It was the last hour of harmless idleness, of open, innocent pleasure. A little later, and most of those bright façades would be darkened, the crowd would have melted away, and vice and crime, the painted houris, the night prowlers, would have the pavements to themselves save for the steady footfall of an occasional *sergent-de-ville* tramping on his monotonous beat like a fine piece of mechanism that could not possibly work wrong.

Pâquerette ate her ice slowly, dreamily, scarcely tasting the delicate flavour of last summer's strawberries, the exotic aroma of crushed vanilla. She was listening to Hector de Valnois' lowered voice as he stood by her side in the window telling the old, old story—the tempter's story, which the serpent whispered to Eve four thousand years ago, and which the ears of all Eve's daughters absorb to-day as if it were the newest invention in the world.

To Paquerette the story seemed full of strangeness and wonder. She had been wooed before, she had been won before, wooed honestly, truthfully, soberly, by a good and brave man: won easily because it had been her convenience to be won. Life had been very blank for her when Ishmael offered to share and guard her lot. She had flung herself into his arms as the

bird, scared by the terrors of an unknown world, flies back to its cage. But there had been no wild rapture in that wooing, very little passion on either side. Her heart had never been touched as it was touched to-night. She had never before been tempted to surrender conscience, honour, life even, as she was to-night for the love of the lover who pleaded to her.

Lisette was fond of ices. She ate two of Tortoni's largest make, and had a glass of maraschino afterwards to prevent the ices doing her any harm. She was so completely occupied by her consumption of this refreshment and by her observation of the people who were sitting at the little tables—the women in fashionable gowns, the men in fashionable overcoats and gibus hats, that she took very little notice of those two standing by the window. And they seemed unconscious of her and of all the outside world, or saw it only as a picture—a piece of moving dumb-show passing before their eyes, as they looked down at the boulevard with its long lines of lamps, its glittering cafés and theatres.

'Zanita is not so beautiful as I expected her to be,' said Pâquerette, by-and-by, after a pause, her thoughts reverting idly to the box on the pit tier and its little court of men with stars and ribands.

'Beautiful! Nobody ever called her beautiful,' answered Hector, lightly. 'She is *chic*; she is the fashion; people talk about her—that is all. They will talk about somebody else next year; and Zanita will be forgotten. It is a short life and a merry one.'

'And the end may be sad.'

'The end may be the hospital, or the river, or a brilliant marriage. Such women as Zanita have made great marriages before to-day. Who can fathom the depth of a fool's folly?'

They went down to the boulevard again, Lisette following them. On the steps of Tortoni's they brushed against a man of middle-age, slender, elegant-looking, with the graceful figure of youth, but with the careworn forehead, faded eyes, and iron gray hair and moustache of advanced years.

He recognised Hector with a careless nod, and honoured Pâquerette with a deliberate stare.

'Who is that?' asked Pâquerette, as they passed on.

'A kinsman of mine. Balzac says that in every family there is one member whose existence is the disease of the rest. That man who passed just now is our family malady.'

'He looks like a gentleman,' said Pâquerette, wonderingly.

'He is a whited sepulchre. The history of that man is full of dark and secret pages. I never see him without a cold shiver. And now my name has come before the public, I don't

suppose he will let me alone very long. He is a man who has always lived upon his fellow-creatures, and no doubt I shall count for something among his resources. I shall have to go up and be taxed.'

It was nearly one o'clock. Pâquerette began to be frightened, and to hurry her footsteps. What would Ishmael say? Hector reassured her, declaring that her husband would be absorbed by his books and drawings, and would not know the hour. There were no public clocks in that desert region yonder where Pâquerette lived.

'It is the dullest street in all Paris,' she said, shuddering. 'I hate to go back there: it is like going into a tomb.'

Hector walked with them to the end of the street, and there he and Pâquerette parted with silent pressure of lingering hands, with eyes looking into eyes under the street lamp—a parting which foretold of meetings to come although no words were spoken. Lisette accompanied her young friend to the apartment on the second floor. If there was to be a quarrel between husband and wife, she would be there to shield the offender. She had taken Pâquerette under her wing long ago; and unhappily, she had now taken Hector under her wing also. He pleased her, he dominated her by his poetical looks and patrician air. He belonged to the world which had always been the world of her choice and of her affection, not the world of honest labour and patience in well-doing.

Ishmael had gone to one of his political clubs, and the conclave had lasted until late. He had not yet returned. There was a little note for Pâquerette on the mantelpiece:

'As you are enjoying yourself at the opera, I shall go to the Cercle de Lafayette,' wrote Ishmael. 'There is to be a grand debate to-night, and I dare say I shall be late. Don't wait up for me.'

Pâquerette breathed more freely. She dreaded the sight of her husband's face. It was a relief to stave off the evil hour of their meeting.

If she could have told him the truth—that she had long ceased to love him—that she had given the strongest feelings of which her heart and brain were capable to another! Unhappily, candour is not easy in a case of this kind. The burden of sin might be lessened, perhaps, by some hard and bitter truths; but hand in hand with the dark shade of sin travels the shadow called shame; and they two must creep on together by obscure passages, by loathsome lanes and foulest winding ways, rather than face the broad light of day. Almost for the first time since her baby's death, Pâquerette lay down to rest without saying her prayers, and without looking at the distant graveyard where the little one lay.

Ishmael went his way through the bright days of April and May, the balmier time of June, untroubled by any doubt of his wife's loyalty, or by any apprehension of her danger. He was not a careless husband, but he was a husband whose life was so full of work, and of all-absorbing interests connected with that work, as to leave no margin for morbid fancies or jealous fears. He loved his wife as much as he had ever yet loved woman, though not, perhaps, so fondly as he had loved those baby brothers of his. After his fashion, he was honestly and faithfully attached to her. She had not touched his deepest feelings—she had not entered that holy of holies in the heart of man which opens to receive but one image in a lifetime. The altar in that sanctuary was still empty, the lamp unlighted. She had moved him to pity her; she had made him fond of her, proud even of her graceful prettiness, the growing refinement of her thoughts and ways. But she had not gone further than this. She had not made herself the sharer of his hopes and dreams, the chosen companion of his life. Her society was not all the world to him—not all-sufficient company for mind as well as heart. He had hoped at first that she would become all this, that she would learn to be interested in all that was vital to his success; but he found after a little while that it was not in her nature to care intensely for anything outside the narrow circle of her own small interests and frivolous pleasures. Her piano was more to her than all the life-blood in all the hearts of Paris. A new song moved her more than the mightiest convulsions that stirred her country. This talk of an impending war in the East, for instance—a war which, however victorious for France, must inevitably swallow up thousands of French soldiers in a great gulf of blood and fire—hardly moved her with one thrill of fear or grief. She could not realise the pain and loss of others outside the little space which was her world.

'You will not have to fight, will you?' she asked her husband, with a touch of anxiety.

'No, love. I had a lucky number drawn for me two years ago at Rennes, and I am exempt. A good priest I know looked after the business.'

That was all she cared to know. The cannon might thunder, France and the foe might roll in the dust, destroying and destroyed, so long as the horror and the terror of it all came not across her path.

This little rift within the lute, this lack of sympathy between husband and wife, had gradually widened to a great gulf. Ishmael had come to regard his pretty young wife as the ornament of his domestic existence—a something to be cherished and cared for, to be kept beautiful and neat, but not as the half of his life. I

he were worried, he told Pâquerette nothing of his trouble ; if he were flushed with some new idea, some improvement or invention which might bring him gain and fame in the future, he did not ask her to share his hopes. He had tried to interest her in his work, to explain the beauties of the mechanical arts, but she had not even tried to understand him. She had shrugged her shoulders and turned away from his diagrams with disgust. Why could he not draw caricatures after Gavarni—soldiers, battle-scenes, after Meissonier, as Hector de Valnois did, instead of those everlasting wheels, and angles, and numerals, which he was for ever jotting with his clumsy pencil ?

Refused all sympathy where it would have pleased him best to find it, Ishmael became daily more devoted to his work and his studies. That thirst for knowledge which had been an instinct with him as a little child on board the steamer—when he wanted to know why the engine did this or that, and what made the waves rise and fall, and why the sun was red in the evening—was still a part of his nature. Like that heaven-born mathematician, Clerk Maxwell—who used to question his mother about everything he saw, 'What is the go of it ?' 'Yes,' when inadequately enlightened, 'but what's the particular go of it ?'—Ishmael wanted to learn the 'particular go' of everything which he had to do ; and he had, by reason of this eager curiosity, advanced from the rudimentary labours of a simple *gâcheur* to a very considerable mastery of the mechanical arts as involved in the trade of a builder and contractor. Nor had he narrowed his mind within the circle of his own interests. His evening recreations, always of an intellectual kind, took him among circles where all things in heaven and earth were discussed with the fever of youth and enthusiasm. His clubs were democratic clubs, for albeit proscription had thinned the ranks of Republicanism, and the shining lights were for the most part languishing in the purlieus of Leicester Square, and wasting their eloquence in the restaurants of Rupert Street and Castle Street, there were thinkers and talkers among the Reds still left in Paris, dreamers who cherished the old impossible dream of a France self-governed, a democracy of all the talents. Strange for those who have survived until to-day to discover that a Republic is ever so much more costly an institution than even an Empire, and that nepotism and place-hunting, and bloated sinecurists, and cats that catch no mice can thrive as well under the flag of the people as under golden eagles and an Imperial master.

All young men are Radicals at heart, and Ishmael had a sneaking fondness for the Reds in these early years of the Empire, albeit he could see that the new master of France was doing great things for the country, most of all in the building line, and

was a man to be respected as a hard-working and intelligent ruler, and not a king of Yvetôt.

Ishmael read all the Republican authors—Hugo, Schœlcher, Lammenais, Eugène Sue. He read the papers of all colours, and could survey the political horizon from more than one standpoint; and as he read and investigated, his faith in the Empire grew stronger, and he began to speak in his club on the side of established power, and to be known as an Imperialist. He saw great works inaugurated, houses built for the labouring classes, hospitals, charitable institutions of all kinds arising in the outskirts of Paris. He saw the city prosperous, beloved of the world, a place to which the strange nations flocked, bringing their gold as tribute. If there were rottenness under this seeming prosperity, Ishmael had not found it out.

The summer wore on, the allied armies were marching upon Varna, and the Russians, after terrible repulses and losses, had raised the siege of Silistria. War news was eagerly waited for in Paris; but of that fatal expedition to the marshes and deserts of the Dobrutja which cost France so many of her bravest soldiers the Parisians were told very little in those days. It is only long after a war, in the journals of doctors and newspaper men, that the dark story of disease and famine, the shameful details of mismanagement and neglect, become known to the world.

There was trouble nearer home than in the swamps washed by the Danube. The pestilence which raged in those Roumanian deserts, in the tainted atmosphere of Varna, was doing its deadly work in France and in England. This year of plenteous harvests and overflowing barns, prosperous vineyards and luxuriant hop-gardens, was also a year of death. While the golden grain ripened and the grape purpled under the summer sun, while the husbandman shouldered his sickle and trudged through dewy fields to his harvesting, that other Reaper, whose crop never fails, rested neither by day nor night, and *his* barns, too, were overflowing, and his garners were full. That year of 1854 was one of those terrible seasons which are remembered as cholera years. A cloud of death hung over the crowded slums of Paris and London. The black flag hung at the entrances of streets and alleys, warning the stranger of his peril. It was a dreadful time; and yet the daily work of men and women went on, houses were built as well as coffins, the clink of the hammer sounded cheerily on the new boulevards and in the new markets, and there were merrymakings and holidays, and the ribald jesters who make light of heaven and hell cried, as of old, '*A ta santé, Morbus!*' as they tossed off their *cogne* or their *pétrole* at the wine-shops on the road to the overcrowded cemetery, where the gorged earth refused

to perform its office of purification, and the reeking field was one foul mass of corruption and decay.

Ishmael laughed to scorn all danger for himself, but he was full of care for Pâquerette. He looked at her anxiously every evening when he came from his work, took her little hands in his, and drew her towards him in the full light of the window to see if there were any sign of the spoiler in that delicate face. But Death, the Spoiler, had set no mark upon Pâquerette's beauty. There was a worse enemy at work, and Ishmael saw no sign of that greater evil.

Never had Pâquerette looked prettier than in these August evenings. She knew how to set off her beauty to the utmost advantage; she had acquired the art of dress to the highest perfection compatible with small means. She followed the fashions with an admirable dexterity, which imparted to cheap cashmere and a straw bonnet all the grace and style of famous milliners in the Court quarter. And there was a new brightness in her manner that heightened her delicate prettiness—a light in her eyes, a flush upon her cheek, a faintly tremulous look in the half-parted lips which recalled the image of a bird poising itself on quivering wings before flashing into sudden flight. Ishmael remembered just such a look in her face that day at Vincennes, when, almost strangers to each other, he held her in his arms as they waltzed to the music of the cracked old organ on the scantily-trampled greensward.

Ishmael was nervous about his wife's comings and goings at this time of pestilence. He questioned her more closely than of old as to where she went, warned her against infected neighbourhoods. They were only too near the fever-dens of that terrible Passage Ménilmontant, with its double range of low houses, black with the grime of centuries; its blind windows, and dark and filthy entrances, which look like the openings of caverns; its population of rag-pickers, sewer men, dealers in broken glass; its foul odours from gutter and muck-heap mixed with the reek of coarsest viands; its low-browed, murderous wine-shops, where bottles and knives play their part in many a midnight brawl, and where, in the gray light of next morning, the patron wipes the stains from tables where the red splashes are as often of blood as of wine. Here the cholera-fiend might be supposed to find congenial quarters, to hold high revel in a nest that had been prepared for his coming.

Ishmael entreated Pâquerette to avoid all such neighbourhoods, to take the broad airy highways when she went for her walks, to be careful what shops she entered; in a word, to go about as little as possible.

'If I were to take your advice, I should make myself ill by

staying at home, she answered, fretfully, one morning when he was particularly urgent in his lecture. 'I should get the cholera merely from brooding upon it. Monsieur Vielbois told me there was nothing so bad as fear and low spirits. You need not be afraid that I shall go for a walk in the Passage Ménilmontant: it is quite bad enough to live within a quarter of a mile of that detestable place. I seldom go anywhere except to Madame Moque's, and I generally do all my marketing with her.'

'I am glad of that,' said Ishmael. 'Lisette is a clever woman, and she won't lead you into danger. Oh! by the bye, you have given me so many *charcuterie* dinners of late. You know I am not particular what I eat, but one gets tired of that kind of thing day after day—a perpetual flavour of garlic and sage, or that faint taste of stale truffles; and when a man has to be about all day using his arms and legs, a more nourishing diet is better.'

'I thought you liked me to deal with the Moques,' retorted his wife, sullenly.

Forgetfulness and indifference had been growing upon her of late in regard to all domestic affairs. She thought more of a pair of new gloves or bonnet strings than of her husband's dinner; and just at the last, as she was hurrying home from a day in fairer scenes, she would look in at Moque's *en passant*, and ask him to send something—anything—for dinner at once; and in this manner Ishmael had been made to consume a good deal of the *rebut* of the *charcutier's* shop.

'Yes, I like you to deal there for anything we really want,' answered Ishmael, quietly. He was not the man to lose his temper for such a detail as a bad dinner seven days a week. 'But we need not live all the year round upon cold pig to oblige Lisette's husband. Beef and mutton are an agreeable variety, and a good deal more wholesome. Let us have beef and mutton in future, my pet.'

'That means that I am to be at home all the afternoon to cook the dinner,' said Pâquerette, petulantly.

'Surely a *pot-au-feu* is not such a troublesome business as that! Why, what a little gadabout you have grown!'

Pâquerette crimsoned and looked down.

'My life is so dull in this dreary room,' she said, 'with those intolerable sphinxes staring at me all day long.'

'You have your piano, dear.'

'If I hadn't, I should go mad. I tell you it does me good to get into the air. You are out all day. Why should I be cooped up within four walls?'

'There is some difference,' answered Ishmael, gravely. 'I have to go out to work for our daily bread, while you have only the home to think about.'

'If I were not to go out now and then, home would be as bad as St. Lazare,' retorted Pâquerette, petulantly. 'I would rather be back in the Rue Sombreuil, where I could sit in the yard all day. At least, I could see a little bit of sky overhead, and hear voices from twenty open windows, and see faces and people coming and going. This house is like a tomb.'

'It is something to be in a respectable house where there are only honest people,' answered Ishmael, feeling nearer anger than he had ever yet felt with Pâquerette. 'I don't think you ought to complain of the dulness of your life. Of late you have gone to a theatre or a concert two or three times a week. I wonder Lisette can so often get away from the Cristal.'

'They are tired of her at the Cristal,' said Pâquerette, shortly. 'They want newer faces, younger singers. If you would only have let me sing my little *patois* songs at the Cristal, I should have been able to earn forty or fifty francs a week, and then *you* would not be the only person to earn our daily bread.'

These last words were spoken with a sneer, the token of irritated nerves. Pâquerette kept glancing at the solemn black-faced clock between the bronze sphinxes. Her husband had come home to breakfast, and was returning to his work later than usual. She expected a letter, a letter which must not be delivered while Ishmael was there, and she was in agonies.

'My child, how pale you are!' cried her husband, pausing with *casquette* in hand. 'I'm afraid you are ill.'

'No, no; only a little nervous. You worry me so with all that solemn talk about nothing. There, there! don't be late for your work. You shall have beef for your dinner, as much as you can eat—beef *par dessus la tête*, and I will not make my *debut* at the Palais de Cristal: that is all past and done with.'

'My pet, can you wonder that I refused to let you appear before that rabble yonder? You, my wife, with bare arms and shoulders, and a painted face, like the rest of them! The very thought of it fills me with horror.'

'I might have appeared at the opera and made a mad success—like Bosio, perhaps, but for you,' she said, gloomily. 'It is hard, when God has given one talent, to be obliged to hide one's light under a bushel.'

'My dear, the time may come when your light will not be so hidden,' answered Ishmael, with infinite patience. 'I may be a rich man some day; and then you can sing to an audience whose praise will be worth having without appearing on a public stage.'

'"May be," and "some day,"' mocked Pâquerette. 'I have heard those words before. The grandfather used to say he would be rich some day.'

Ishmael stooped to kiss her reluctant lips, and went his way without another word. What good is there in arguing with a spoilt child crossed in its fancy?

When he went home that evening Pâquerette was absent as usual, but there was a large piece of beef simmering in the *pot-au-feu*, from which rose a goodly odour of vegetable soup, and the cloth was laid neatly with a solitary cover.

Beside the wine bottle there lay a letter in Father Bressant's quaint, cramped hand—a brief letter, but to the purpose, and quite long enough to spoil Ishmael's dinner.

'Go at once to Pen-Hoël,' wrote the priest. 'The pestilence has been busy in our poor village, and there has been great trouble at the château. Lose no time if you would see your father alive. If I am spared, I shall meet you there.'

Ishmael wrote a line to Pâquerette telling her that he was going to Brittany to see a relative dangerously ill. He left her money enough to last for a fortnight, but hoped to be back with her in a week. He promised to write as soon as he arrived at his destination; urged her to keep up her spirits and take care of her health. She could stay with Madame Moque during his absence if she felt dull or nervous alone.

He left his dinner untasted. On his way out he looked into the neat little shop where Madame Morice sold her groceries, her chocolate *à la vanille*, *pâte d'Italie*, burnt onions for gravies, and little bottles of mushrooms and anchovies in oil, the refinements of the grocer's trade, which had but a small sale in that neighbourhood; only the Morices were a prudent and a frugal couple, neither gave nor took credit, lived upon little, and contrived to make a small business profitable.

'I am called away into the country by illness,' said Ishmael, hurriedly. 'If you can look after my wife a little in my absence, *chère dame*, I shall take it as a favour. She may mope while I am gone, poor child!'

'I do not think Madame will mope very much,' answered the *bourgeoise*, with a curious shrug of her shoulders; 'but I will do what I can—for your sake.'

## CHAPTER XXIV

### 'AS MESSENGERS OF DEATH'

THE rail carried Ishmael to Chartres between night-fall and morning. He started for Alençon on the *banquette* of a diligence in the gray light of a September dawn, with a cold wind creeping over the house-tops and along the empty streets. From Alençon another diligence took him to Fougères. On alighting at the inn where the diligence stopped, he found the only person astir was a sleepy waiter in a *Salle à manger* redolent of the fumes of last night's wine and last night's tobacco blended with faint, fetid odours left by the dinners of the last week. This person informed him that the diligence for Pontorson did not start till two o'clock in the afternoon ; so, after some difficulty, he negotiated the hire of a horse, for which he left nearly all the contents of his pocket-book by way of deposit. Mounted on this unknown brute, which behaved after the manner of Normandy horses for the first two or three miles, he left the antique town, with its picturesque castle and mediæval towers, and rode at a steady six miles an hour towards the boundary line of Brittany. How strange and yet how familiar the landscape seemed to him !—the long straight road, now ascending and now descending by many a gentle undulation, and by some steepish hills ; the quiet fields, so dim and gray, and unreal under the morning mists. The tall poplars, the luxuriant hedgerows, the narrow streams. How different from that stony wilderness in which he had lived for the last three years amidst the ceaseless din of voices, the everlasting thread of multitudinous feet ! What a feeling of peace in the air ! What a holy stillness, broken only by the cry of the corncrake, or the croaking of frogs in a marshy corner under the alder hedge yonder. The old scenes, the old atmosphere brought back the memory of old stories, old superstitions, which he had heard told again and again beside the wide chimney place in the kitchen at Pen-Hoël, where the little hunchbacked, sandy-haired tailor employed on the premises to make liveries for the coachman and footman was received into the friendly circle after supper and made much of for the sake of his inexhaustible fund of anecdote and legend. From the tailor's pallid lips, or from the wandering Pillawer, admitted to the kitchen hearth for an evening, and lodged in a stable or a barn for the night after, Ishmael had learnt all that

he knew of his native province. From these he had heard many an awful story of shipwreck, and of the old prayer of the sailor, 'Lord, save us! our boat is so small and Thy sea is so big;' of the hurricane which is never lulled till the waves have cast up the corpses of heretics and all other evil creatures; of the ghostly multitude of the drowned whose phantom forms show white upon the crests of the waves on the Day of the Dead; of the spirit-voices, piteous, lamenting, which fill the Bay of the Departed with a sound of wailing.

Here, too, he had heard of the strange-looking men clothed in white raiment, black-bearded, carrying staves, and with sacks upon their shoulders, who used to be seen after nightfall on the lonely roads between Châteaulin and Quimper—men of dark and fatal aspect. The Custom House officers will tell you that these are smugglers; but do not believe them. They are demons, who prowl around the abodes of the dying, waiting to carry off the souls of the dead; and if the good angel of the dying is not quick enough, the helpless souls are bundled into the demon's bag and carried off to the marshes of Saint Michel, where they lie hidden in holes and foul places till they are set free by mass and prayer. Those dismal marshes are peopled with souls in pain; and if you pass that way at night, you will hear the cry of their anguish mixed with the wailing of the wind among the reeds.

Beside that evening fire he had heard of the wreckers of old, and how, like their opposite neighbours on the Cornish coast, they lighted bonfires to beguile the helpless mariners ashore; or how they would tie a lantern to the horns of a bull, twisting the rope round one of his fore legs, so that at every step the animal lowered or lifted his head with a swaying motion of the lantern, which made it look from afar like the light of a ship at sea, thus luring the unwary sailor on to the rocks. Very fixed was the belief of the Breton of those days that all which the sea cast up on his shore was his rightful property.

Here, too, Ishmael had heard of gnomes and fairies, benevolent or malicious; of the earth-men, husbands of the fairies, the *poulpicans*, the Breton Robin Goodfellows, who ring their fairy bells in the woods to deceive the poor little shepherd lads in quest of their lost goats, who run after the girls who go home too late from night-watch or Pardon. Here he had listened to wonderful legends of the city of Ys swallowed up by the sea: you may see the stones of her ancient altars at low tide fifteen or twenty feet beneath the clear water.

Strange to come back from Paris, the city where people believed in so little, to this quiet country where they believed so much; where the humble village priest, a son of the soil,

born of peasant parents, reared at the tail of the plough, was a power and an influence; where the *fleur de lys* was still a sacred symbol, and the flag of Republicanism a rag striped with blood; where the memory of the Chouans, with their screech-owl cry, was still fresh in the minds of the people, and the stories of atrocities committed on one side by the hated Blues—the soldiers of the Republic—on the other by the sons of the soil, were still told by the winter fire.

Yes; it was a backward and ignorant land, a land of old superstitions, old creeds, old loyalties; but, whatever it was, Ishmael loved every rood of its green fields, every tree, and every hedge-flower. He had been happy in the great city, full of work in the present, full of hope for the future; but he had no love for that stony wilderness. He thought of Paris as an embodied indifference to man and his sufferings—cold, inaccessible, inhuman. You might starve or rot in her alleys, and she would care nothing. You might drown yourself in her river, you might languish in her prisons, you might steep yourself in those foul vices which seemed an element of her atmosphere, and she would care not one jot for your agony, your despair, your ruin of soul and body, your untimely death. The best she would give you would be a free funeral.

But here, in these country roads, among these pleasant meadows, it seemed to him as if all nature thrilled with sympathy. The animals came to the field gates and looked at him gravely with eyes full of friendliness. The birds in the hedgerows chirped and twittered for him. The soft motion of leafy boughs had a kind of language; and the clouds sailing above his head had a meaning here which they never had in Paris, where he rarely lifted his eyes skyward.

He was full of anxiety about his father, whom he might never again see alive—the letter seemed to mean as much as that; and yet the very atmosphere of his native land comforted him. He thought of his young brothers, and what delight it would be to clasp them to his breast, to see the bright young faces, to feel the touch of those loving lips. Would they have forgotten him in four years?—half a lifetime for the younger of the two, who would be only seven now. This was a question which troubled him sorely. It would be such a blow to find himself forgotten. Of the heritage that he had renounced, or of his father's injustice in exacting such a sacrifice from him, he thought not at all. He cared nothing for money in the abstract; and he had a conviction that he was going to be rich some day. Of all the schemes that he had ready for development when the chance arose some one would prove a mine of gold. He had heard many histories of men who had

made fortunes beginning with nothing, and he knew that he was on the right track.

It was a long ride to Pontorson, and he had to rest and refresh his horse on the way. He left the animal at the inn near the bridge, thinking to save time by walking the seven miles that lay between him and his destination rather than by waiting to rest the horse. Three o'clock was striking as he crossed the bridge; and now he was really in his own province, his foot upon his native soil. The hedgerows and fields he had seen hitherto were Norman hedgerows and fields. There was very little difference between the two provinces so far; but to Ishmael it seemed as if the soil had another look, as if the orchards were more fertile, the cottages more homely after he had crossed the river.

He walked at a swinging pace, more eager, more anxious as he drew nearer home. At Pontorson they had told him terrible things of the cholera. The hand of God had been heavy upon the little town, they said; for whereas, in Paris, in the time of pestilence, the people were always inclined to suspect some human infamy working evil—the Government poisoning the wells, or something equally diabolical—the simple rustic recognised only the chastisement of an offended Heaven.

'Have there been no precautions taken?' asked Ishmael of the priest who told him how the funeral bell had been sounding daily, as in the awful year of '32, when a vision of gigantic women in red garments had been seen at Brest just before the coming of the pestilence blowing the blast of death across the valleys.

The priest pointed to half-a-dozen open graves dug in advance. *This* was how they had prepared for the scourge. A sombre sense of fatality possessed their souls. 'God has given us over to the demon,' they said. The gorged graveyard was a focus of infection in the midst of each settlement; but the idea of carrying away their dead to a distant cemetery, banishing the departed from the family grave, from the bones of dead and gone ancestors, from the sound of the voices of the living, from the lights of the village, was repelled as a kind of sacrilege.

Just outside a little *bourg* Ishmael met a farmer's cart with a woman sitting on the shaft and a man walking at the horse's head. The horse was smart with his collar of blue sheepskin and his tasselled bridle. He had a branch of Spanish chestnut tied upon his head to keep off the flies, and was decked with bells, which tingled gaily as he went along. But the faces of the man and woman were full of gloom. A little procession in black

raiment walked behind the cart; and in the cart, wrapped in their winding-sheets, lay the corpses of two children on a bed of purple clover, fresh flowers and foliage scattered above them. The plague had been busy in the villages and farms, and there had been no time to make coffins for all the dead. These were to be laid in the cool, dark earth of their grandfather's grave.

The sight of that melancholy train filled Ishmael with a sudden horror. His brothers! Had they escaped the pestilence? He had thought of them till this moment as the embodiment of health and vigour. It had not occurred to him that they could be ill. But the look of white despair in the mother's face, the father's gloomy brow, and those young forms lying side-by-side amidst the clover and the leafage, seemed like a presage of evil. Were things as bad as this in the neighbourhood of Pen-Hoël? And how could he be sure his brothers were not in peril?

He took out Father Bressant's letter and re-read it hastily. There had been trouble at the château. That trouble he had taken heretofore to mean his father's illness; but it seemed to him now that the trouble was a thing apart—a something which had preceded his father's malady. He was almost within sight of the village in the hollow, he was on the very spot where he had parted from the good priest four years ago: yes, just on this crest of the hill he had turned to watch the vanishing figure of his one faithful friend. He was so near, yet all in a moment he was stricken with the sudden sickness of a great fear, and it seemed to him as if his feet refused to carry him any further. He felt as if he must sink down upon a bank and lie there helpless, inert, till chance brought someone by who could tell him what had happened at the château, could assure him that his brothers were alive and well. Then, and then only, could he have strength to go the rest of the way.

He sat down for a few minutes, wiped the cold dew from his forehead, and nerved himself to finish his journey. Why should the death of those peasant children so alarm him? Neglected, poorly fed, badly lodged, they were an easy prey for the destroyer. But his darlings were lodged luxuriously, cared for tenderly, watched by day and night. Why should he fear for them? What shelter could be a safer stronghold from pestilence and death than the old home of his forefathers, which had never been polluted by the occupation of strange races? Clever as he was in the constructive arts, he had not yet been awakened to the broad questions of sanitation; and he did not know that these good old family mansions are often dens of fever and sinks of hidden pollution.

He quickened his pace for that final mile, and he was a little

breathed when he stood before the door of Father Bressant's presbytery, which was not much superior to the neighbouring cottages, while the habits of the priest were even less luxurious than those of his humblest parishioners.

The door stood open to air and sunlight, the little parlour had its old orderly, peaceful look, furnished with a fine old cherrywood press with brass mounts, a ponderous walnutwood writing-table, and three or four century-old chairs, an inheritance from a peasant ancestry. A *secrétaire* in a corner displayed a couple of shelves of books, a collection which, small and shabby as it might be, gave a learned air to the room, while upon the high mantel-shelf a few pieces of Rouen pottery and a handsome pair of brass candlesticks made an improvement upon the usual village decoration of saucepan-lids and flat-irons. The room was empty, but on the priest's desk there lay a letter directed to Monsieur Sébastien Caradec.

'Go at once to the château. No time to be lost.'

That was the whole of the letter. The stroke of the death-bell startled Ishmael as he read the priest's injunction.

He skirted the churchyard as he went up the hill to Pen-Hoël. There was no one to be seen in the little cemetery. Ishmael saw an open grave near the tower from which that dismal reverberation of the bell pealed out at solemn intervals like a minute gun. An old man was pulling the rope just inside the doorway of the tower. Ishmael's first impulse was to stop and question this ancient sexton; but remembering that the man was stone deaf and painfully slow of apprehension even when he heard, he hurried on. The cupola of the château was visible above the crest of the wooded slope. Ishmael's feet were familiar with every possible and impossible approach to the place of his birth, and he went straight as the crow flies, making a line through the underwood athwart the great boles of the chestnuts and oaks until he leapt upon the low balustrade of the terrace and stood in front of the long range of windows, curtained just as of old, with the same air of a house in which everybody has gone to sleep. No, not quite the same as of old. He started back at the sight of the doorway draped with black, solemn funereal velvet, sprinkled with silver notes of admiration, which were meant to represent tears. The funeral bell boomed and vibrated in the green hollow yonder, and from the shadowy doorway there came a slow and solemn train. A coffin heaped with flowers was borne into the light, and then came the priest in his robes, and his acolytes in their white surplices. Two gentlemen followed, in deep mourning and with dismal countenances, then three of the old servants whom Ishmael remembered, and this was all.

He stood aside while the funeral procession passed along the terrace and went slowly down the drive. Neither priest nor mourners had looked at Ishmael. He went into the house and upstairs to his father's room without meeting a mortal.

Outside the door of that well-remembered chamber he came to a dead stop. How often he had entered that room in days gone by to be lectured, reproved, threatened; hardly ever to receive word or token of affection. And now it was, perhaps, the chamber of death, and he would enter it like Esau, robbed in advance of his birthright. For the portion he had surrendered he cared nothing; but there was a touch of bitterness in the thought of how the surrender had been exacted from him.

He knocked softly, but there was no answer; and then he opened the door quietly and went in. The room he thus entered was his father's study and favourite sitting-room. Monsieur's bedroom opened out of it on one side, Madame's on the other, with her boudoir and dressing-room beyond.

The study was empty, and Ishmael went through to his father's bedroom. A Sister of Charity was asleep in an arm-chair by the window. The bed was in an alcove, heavily draped, remote from the light; and in the deep shadow Monsieur Caradec's face had the leaden pallor of death. As Ishmael approached with noiseless footfall the father's eyes opened and looked at his son.

'Sébastien!' he muttered; 'then there is someone of my blood living still.'

'My brothers!' gasped Ishmael, frozen by that speech, unable to contain himself.

'You have no brothers; they were laid in their graves a week ago. Their mother followed them just now. You must have met the funeral.'

'Yes.'

Ishmael fell on his knees by the bedside, buried his head in the coverlet, and sobbed aloud.

The Sister opened her eyes, saw that kneeling figure, understood in a moment, and stole quietly from the room, leaving father and son together.

'What can you care for their death?' said his father, bitterly. 'You abandoned your home and your kindred, renounced your name. You were always at heart an alien.'

'Who made me an alien, father?' asked the young man, lifting up his head and wiping away those blinding tears. 'My home was less than a home, my kindred were not like kindred—except those dear little children: they loved me, and I loved them truly, dearly, with all my heart, looking forward with

hope to a day when we should be brothers again, and know each other and love each other again.'

'Broken links are not so easily reunited,' said the Count, quietly. 'Your brothers were stricken by cholera last week. First one drooped and fell, then the other. Within four days from the first note of alarm both were dead. Their mother was in a state of hysteria from the hour her elder boy was stricken, and two days after the double funeral the scourge took hold of her. It is in the very air we breathe. The earth we tread upon reeks with poison; it hangs in the heavy mists of evening and morning, and clings to the sodden leaves of the trees. It is everywhere—in ditches, wells, marshes, copses, cottage-gardens. The poor have been dying like rotten sheep. If I have escaped, it is because the hand of death was on me already. The grief and agony of the last fortnight have only hastened my end. You should not have come here, Sébastien. You are coming into the jaws of death.'

'I am not afraid of death. The cholera is raging in Paris too. Father Bressant wrote to tell me that you were ill. But you have been ill a long time, it seems. He ought to have written to me sooner.'

Everything in the invalid's appearance told of a lingering malady, a slow decay. The stroke of the pestilence was not here. The gradual wearing out of a joyless life—disappointment, vain regret, carking care—these were the foes that had sapped the citadel.

'I have been ailing for a long time,' answered Monsieur Caradec, 'but have not been dangerously ill. Father Bressant teased me for permission to write to you some months ago, but I forbade him. I told him that you had taken your own road in life, and that all links between us were broken. But he wrote to you after all, it seems. And you have come—come to see me die.'

He spoke slowly and with evident effort. A short, hard cough stopped his utterance every now and then, and Ishmael saw that the white cambric handkerchief was stained with blood. The Count's lungs had been affected for a long time. He had been a broken man for the last two years, crawling about in the sunshine, sympathising with his wife's hypochondriac fancies, trying every new remedy, every variety of treatment, his chief conversation about doctors and doctors' stuff. The shock of his children's death had stricken him down, and a fit of weeping had brought on a violent hæmorrhage, which threatened immediate death. He had been kept alive since that attack by devoted nursing, had lived to see his wife stricken by the dire disease which was abroad in the land, and to see the windows darkened for her funeral.

But the doctors gave no hope of his recovery. He would

never leave his room alive. Life was a question of so many days, or so many hours, more or less.

He looked at his eldest son with eyes in which there was no love. He felt no comfort in the presence of this last of his race. He could only remember those two whom he had loved, those sons with whose existence there was no association of shame, no memory that meant agony, as of that nameless grave at Montmartre. He did not say that he was glad to see Ishmael. He tolerated his presence, and that was all.

The Nursing-sister came back presently, and administered to her patient. All appetite had gone, but there was a prescribed administration of nourishment, stimulants, medicine, regulated by the clock—a pain and a weariness to the victim, who longed to shuffle off the last of life's burdens. But he submitted to the Sister's troublesome routine as a good Christian who felt that his life was not in his own hands. His rosary—an old carved ivory rosary that had been his mother's—lay on the coverlet beside his wasted hand, and every now and then his thin fingers closed upon the yellow beads, and his white lips shaped a prayer.

The last stroke of the funeral bell had died away in the valley, the Sister had thrown back the Venetian shutters, and the soft evening light filled the room. There had been but little sunshine since the blazing noontides of August—the glorious harvest-time. A dull, heavy sky had brooded over the land, dense mists had hidden the sun, not a breath of wind had stirred the woodland. It seemed as if the poison that reeked from the too fertile earth, a land rich with corruption, had found no escape in the air. Men longed for a hurricane to sweep that infection seaward, and for a flood to wash the tainted ground.

Raymond Caradec had been sleeping uneasily for more than an hour. He opened his eyes and looked up presently with a startled air, and saw his son looking at him in the calm evening light.

'Who is that?' he asked the Sister, pointing to Ishmael as he spoke.

'It is Monsieur Sébastien, sir, your eldest son.'

The dying man heard without seeming to understand. His mind wandered sometimes in the night, was not always clear immediately after slumber; but he had a look in his eyes just now which the Sister had not seen before in him. She had seen that look often enough in other faces, and the dull ashen hue of the skin, deepening to purple about the lips. A host of summer flies came suddenly in at the window while she looked, and surrounded the sick man's head like a cloud of incense. Father Bressant appeared in the doorway just at this moment, and the Priest and the Sister exchanged glances of sad significance. In

their country this cloud of flies hovering over a sick-bed was deemed a fatal omen.

Raymond Caradec looked at his son with a strange intensity in the dim, glazing eyes. He stretched out his thin hand, he gave a faint, half-articulate cry of gladness.

'Lucien,' he murmured, 'pardon! Yes, you smile, you look kindly at me—Lucien—friend—brother! Forgiven!'

And with that fading gaze fixed on his son's face his arms crept slowly down the length of the coverlet, his wasted fingers clutched the silken folds tightly, convulsively, for an instant; and then there came a faint gasping sigh, the bent fingers relaxed and hung loose, the iron-gray head rolled back among the pillows.

Deluded by the dimness of dying eyes, his thoughts travelling back to the far-away time of his youth, Raymond Caradec had mistaken his son's face for the face of his false friend, the friend who had fallen by his sword two and twenty years before on the sands at Bourbon.

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## CHAPTER XXV

### 'SCATTERED TOWARD ALL WINDS'

ISHMAEL went straight from his father's death-bed to that new mound in the churchyard beneath which his young brothers were lying. He knelt, and prayed, and wept beside that grave until the moon was high above the wooded ridge behind the château, shining silvery yonder on the far-away reach of barren sands and the distant waters of the bay. It was past eleven when he went to the presbytery, where he had arranged to spend the night, rather than at the château, where four tall wax tapers were burning in the chamber of death, and where a little old notary from Pontorson was busy setting the seal of authority upon *secrétaires* and drawers, while the Priest and the black-robed Sister knelt and prayed beside the shrouded alcove.

Ishmael's first idea had been to start on his return journey at daybreak, walking to Pontorson, and there remounting the horse he had hired at Fougères. But Father Bressant urged the necessity of his remaining to attend his father's funeral, and to assert himself as his father's sole heir.

'All belongs to you now,' he said: 'the portion which you renounced and the portion that would have gone to your brothers.'

'If it were a thousand times as much, I would renounce it over again to have my brothers,' said Ishmael, sadly. 'As for my father's funeral—well, I suppose I ought to be present, that it is a mark of reverence which I owe to the dead—to the dead to whom I was so much less than a son, an alien always, an outcast always.'

He spent a sleepless night in the neat little cottage bedchamber, with its tiled floor and snow-white linen, and perfume of late roses blowing in at the open lattice; and he was astir early—in the churchyard again, and then at the château, where he heard that the funeral was to take place on the following afternoon. Monsieur Lanion, Madame Caradec's brother-in-law, who had come to attend her funeral, had gone back to the inn at Pontorson, to return to-morrow on the same melancholy errand, and with a faint hope that his wife might be left some small legacy. She would, in any case, succeed to her sister's *dot*, which had been so settled as to return to Madame Caradec's own family in the event of her dying childless.

Ishmael wandered about the empty rooms, desolate for ever more as it seemed to him, since his mind could not realise the idea of any other inhabitants than those whom he remembered in that familiar place. In the *salon* all things remained as Madame Caradec had left them. Her basket of tapestry work, her books, a pile of new novels in yellow covers, her harp—so rarely touched after she left the Faubourg, the little Louis-seize writing-table, on which she had written so many letters of egotistical complaining to her sister in Paris. The children's toys were scattered about the house: guns, helmets, all the panoply of mimic war, boats, cannon, fishing tackle. In every corner Ishmael came upon traces of those two lives now blotted out for ever. The sight of these things, most of all a cage of white mice and a hutch full of rabbits in the stables, filled him with unspeakable sadness. The mice and the rabbits were brisk and gay, jumping about in their narrow quarters, with bright, restless eyes, while they two, the children he had loved, lay cold and still under the churchyard mound. It is just such a thought as this that fills the cup of tears.

He wandered about all day as if in a dream, revisiting spots he had known and loved in his boyhood, seeing old faces which had a strange look, like a book laid aside and half forgotten.

He could hardly realise the fact that the château, with all its surroundings, its farms and dependencies, belonged to him henceforward, although Father Bressant had tried to impress that fact upon him. He felt no joy in the idea of possession, or no joy strong enough to lift his soul out of the gulf of gloom into which it had gone down when he heard of his brothers'

death. It was not until after the funeral, when the notary explained his position and its rights and duties, that the practical side of his character began to assert itself.

'Can you tell me what the estate is worth?' he asked.

'About thirty-thousand francs a year,' answered the man of business; 'but there are accumulations, there are securities worth at least forty thousand francs. Monsieur Caradec lived very closely while he was a widower, and he put aside the economies of that period. He wanted to increase the portion of his younger sons.'

'Yes, I know he was anxious to do that,' replied Ishmael. 'Forty thousand! Do you mean that this forty thousand is at once available—money that I can have to-morrow if I want it?'

The little Breton notary looked scared at the question.

'It is invested in securities that could be realised on the Paris Bourse at a day's notice,' he replied; 'but I hope you do not intend to speculate. Your father amassed that money by economy—sous by sous, I might almost say. And if you are going to jeopardise it——'

'I am not going to throw it into the gutter,' cried Ishmael, his eyes shining with a new excitement, an unknown pleasure. 'I am not going to eat or drink it, or risk it on cards or dice. But I will show you how money can double itself, quadruple itself, multiply itself by twenty. You, in your little towns and villages scattered among the fields, do not know what money means. For the last year I have been pining for capital, were it never so small. My hands have been tied for want of a few thousand francs. Forty thousand is a bagatelle as men reckon money in Paris; but with forty thousand in hand and the power to raise more upon Pen-Hoël——'

'*Dieu de Dieu*,' cried the notary, with horror, 'Pen-Hoël has never been hypothecated since it was a château, since it had a name.'

'I will not lose the place where I was born, be sure, Monsieur Ardour. But I must make the best of my inheritance—the inheritance that has fallen to me in spite of myself.'

Once having begun to consider the position from a practical standpoint, Ishmael's whole mind hardened to the business he had to perform. He dismissed all unnecessary servants. He gave the château into the care of the housekeeper and major-domo, an ancient couple who had been in the decline of life at the period of his mother's marriage. He made his choice of the horses that were to be kept for farm work, the outdoor servants who were to be retained. Father Bressant went about with him and heard him give his orders, and felt proud of his quondam pupil.

'Paris has taught you a great deal more than ever I taught you,' he said, in his cheery old voice, smiling at the new master of Pen-Hoël.

At the end of that long patient life, a life of self-surrender and ill-requited toil, there was nothing terrible in the idea of death. The good old parish priest had grown familiar with the King of Terrors in many a winter night, when he had travelled far, by muddy lanes and wind-swept commons, to carry *le bon Dieu* to some dying peasant. He could smile and be cheerful this evening albeit he had laid the master of Pen-Hoël in his last resting-place only a little while ago.

'Paris is a bitter school; but one learns quickly in her classes,' answered Ishmael. 'It is a city that hardens flesh and blood into iron.'

'You have not become iron,' said the priest. 'I know your heart is as warm and generous as when you used to steal away through the stable-gate yonder to carry your dinner to a sick child or a feeble old woman. And now tell me something about yourself as we walk back to my cottage, where dinner has been waiting for us for the last hour, and where old Nanon will give me a fine scolding if she has prepared any dainty little dish in your honour—her *haricots panachés*, for instance, or a *lapin aux choux*. And so you have been married for more than two years, and have a pretty little wife? I hope she makes you happy.'

'She is very good,' said Ishmael, somewhat sadly, 'and she has improved herself wonderfully since we were married. She had been taught nothing—brought up in squalor and misery, amidst the most abominable surroundings; and yet she was as white, and delicate, and pure as a rose that has just been flung into the gutter. You would be surprised at the progress she has made. She plays and sings exquisitely—music is her one especial gift, you see. And she has learnt to speak like a lady, and to dress herself prettily.'

'Has she learnt to make you happy, Sébastien? That is the main question.'

'I have so little time for happiness—of a domestic kind,' said Ishmael, half apologetically. 'I leave home early; I return late. On some nights I have my club; on other nights I have drawings to make, quantities to take out—a technical business that, connected with my trade. And with Pâquerette's passion for music, she naturally likes to go once in a way to the opera, or to a concert, for which her music-master brings her tickets; and so——'

'You live almost as much asunder as one of those fashionable couples of whom I have read in story-books,' said the old man,

gravely. 'It is not a happy life, Sébastien; it is not a wise life. I have never seen that kind of marriage prosper. Things may go smoothly enough for a little while—Monsieur and Madame see each other too seldom to quarrel; but the end is always misery, sometimes mingled with shame. However, you can change all that now. You are a rich man, a landed proprietor. You will bring your wife to Pen-Hoël, and you and she can live happily together upon the soil from which you sprang.'

'Leave Paris! Live here, among these quiet fields! Sit down by yonder hearth, as my poor father sat, and fold my arms, and waste my life in one long, dull dream! No, Father Bressant; I am not made of the stuff for that kind of death in life. I have only just begun to understand what my work is like, to see my way to leaving my mark upon that thriving, bustling city which gave me a home when I was homeless. No; when my work is done and my hair is whiter than yours, I will come back to my *gîte* like the hunted hare. I will sit down beside the old hearth, and my wife and I will talk of the days of our youth. But in the meantime I must carry out the scheme of my life, for good or evil. Do you know, Father Bressant, that, aided by the capital left yonder by my poor father, I can see my way to a great fortune?' said Ishmael, talking more freely of himself and his prospects to the friend of his boyhood than he would have talked to any other man living. 'My patron and almost partner is an honest man, but a poor man. He has no capital—is content to carry on from hand to mouth, pay wages, and work for other people. But he has friends—a friend at Court. His foster-brother, who once made mud-pies with him in a little village on the Marne, is a man high in the confidence of the Emperor, a man who knows what the future of Paris is to be long before it is known to a mortal outside his own Cabinet. From this gentleman my patron has heard of a plan for the reconstruction of half Belleville—old streets to be pulled down and converted, new boulevards to be built upon waste places. Forty thousand francs invested in the purchase of land now will mean quadruple value a year hence; and I mean to invest every sou, to raise money on Pen-Hoël if necessary, in order to profit by this chance. And then my poor pale Pâquerette can play the lady, and can wear silk gowns, and sing in a *salon* full of guests, and be praised and admired to her heart's content,' he added, to himself rather than to the priest.

'Will it be an honest act, Sébastien, this purchase of land upon private information?'

'Why not? We shall buy the land at its current value—buy in market overt. The future value is our speculation. All our intelligence, all our industry will be brought into the common

fund. We shall not make a fortune without having worked honestly for it. My life must be spent in Paris, Father; but I will bring my wife to Pen-Hoël sometimes for a holiday. It is only a journey of a day and a half now. I will bring her to see the house in which I was born, and the best friend I ever had in my life.'

The two men clasped hands: the younger full of pride and hope—pride in his own strength, hope in a future to be carved by his own hands; the elder, benevolence embodied. They spent the evening together beside the wood fire in the presbytery parlour. The September night was damp and chill, and those blazing logs made the room gay and pleasant. They talked together till the night was late, Ishmael giving his old friend a faithful history of his three years of Parisian life.

Ishmael left the village next morning, remounted the horse he had left at Pontorson, and rode into Fougères in time for the afternoon *diligence*. From Fougères to Paris, by road and rail, was a journey of fifteen hours, and there were gray streaks of morning-light behind the roofs and steeples of Paris as the train crossed the bridge at Asnières. It was past five o'clock when Ishmael arrived, on foot, in the quiet little street at Ménil-montant. But the habits of the house he lived in were of the earliest, and the portress, who occupied a den at the back of the Morice *ménage*, and acted as *femme de peine* for the whole house, was washing the doorstep with a liberal ablution of the footway in front of the threshold when Ishmael came to the door.

He gave her a friendly nod, and was going upstairs, when the woman stopped him.

'The key,' she suggested, making for her den, where she had custody of the lodgers' keys and letters.

'The key!' he echoed, in a surprised tone. 'But Madame is at home, is she not?'

The portress shook her head, thrust the key into his hand, and turned back to her pail and her mop as if anxious to escape interrogation.

'Madame out, and at such an hour of the morning!' exclaimed Ishmael, staring at her, key in hand, stupefied after the long journey, the wakeful, agitated night.

'But yes, Monsieur; Madame went last night. You will find a letter.'

'Yes, yes; without doubt,' he answered, in a different tone, remembering in an instant how he had told his wife that she was to go and stay with Lisette if she felt dull and lonely. No doubt she had felt lonely, and she had gone to Lisette. His first impulse was to go straight to the Rue Franch-colline

without going upstairs at all. But he had his valise, and there was a letter; so he went upstairs.

How empty and desolate any house looks to which a man returns expecting to find wife and kindred, and finding no one! What a dreary aspect the very chairs and tables put on! What a sense of ill-usage, disappointment, vexation takes hold of the man, were the absence only temporary, the time of waiting only a question of an hour or two! This morning, in the chill, gray light, the Egyptian candelabra, the bronze sphinxes stared at Ishmael with an ominous look—the closed piano—swept and garnished—not a vestige of those scattered sheets of music, that untidy portfolio which had often vexed his soul—the bed-chamber, with the alcove closed—the *armoire*, open and empty of all those fineries which had filled it to overflowing—all suggested desertion. The rooms looked as if their mistress had left them for ever. Strange that she should make such a clearance in order to go and spend a few days with Madame Moque.

The letter he had been told of lay on the mantelpiece in the bedroom. He opened it without any foreboding. He did not doubt for an instant that it would confirm his supposition as to Pâquerette's movements. The words which he read there were like a bolt falling from heaven in the midst of calm and sunshine.

'I have left you for ever. Do not seek to know where I have gone. If you follow me, if you find me, the end will be death for at least one of us. I will kill myself rather than see you in your just anger. Yes, I know that you have been good to me, a thousand times too good for the little that I am worth. I know that I am ungrateful, base, abominable, wickedest among wicked women. But I cannot help myself. I believed once that I loved you. You were good to me, and I looked to you for help, and I was at peace—safe, happy in your company; and I thought that was love. Falsehood, all that! I never knew what love meant till I met the man to whom I have given my heart and my soul, my honour, my hope of heaven, all that I have to lose in this life and the next. Think no more of me, or think of me only as a worthless woman who darkened your life for a little while. I renounce all claim upon you. If you find one worthier of you, marry her and fear not. I will never stand up and say, "I am his wife." If there were any law which would break the bond between us, I would accept that law as a blessing to you and to me; but they tell me that in France marriage means for ever. I will never call upon the law to avenge me if you can find your happiness elsewhere, as I have found mine.

'Forgive—forgive—forgive—

'PAQUERETTE.'

She was gone—fled from him for ever—false wife—dishonoured—shameless—her own hand confessing her infamy. But with whom had she so fled? Who was the traitor? There was not much room for doubt. The only men he had ever trusted or admitted to his home were Vielbois, the little old music master, and Hector de Valnois. It was in Hector, therefore, his friend, his comrade, his confidant, the man who saved his life on the fatal fourth of December—it was in him he had to find his wife's seducer.

'It is always the husband's friend,' he said to himself, bitterly. 'I ought to have remembered my mother's history—an example so near home! What should warn a man if not that? And yet I trusted them both. I believed implicitly in her innocence, in his honour.'

He did not stop to break his fast by so much as a crust and a glass of wine; he did not stop to plunge his burning head into a basin of cold water. With the stain of travel still upon him, he left the house and started for the Rue de Grenelle. A *fiacre* passed on its way to the railway station before he had gone very far, and he hailed the man.

'Rue de Grenelle, a hundred and twenty-five, as fast as you can go.'

The carriage rattled off towards the Bastille, along the Rue St. Antoine, across the Pont Neuf, by the Rue des Saints Pères, and into the quiet of the grave old quarter. Valnois' apartment was in a house at the end of the street near the Invalides. The masons were going to their work at the new church of St. Clotilde as Ishmael drove by the Place Bellechasse. The twin towers, with their crocketed spires, were rising amidst a network of scaffolding. Even in the midst of his trouble the keen eye of the artist-workman glanced at yonder pile with a momentary interest.

The historical hotel had an old-world look as Ishmael entered the paved court, ornamented with great green tubs in which bloomless orange trees and great bushes of box made a show of verdure. The stately entrance was sheltered by a *marquise* in iron and glass, under which the flyman drove his *fiacre*. Ishmael had been to the house many a time before to-day. He had breakfasted with Valnois and some of his literary friends—had discussed the aspect of public affairs in an atmosphere of coffee and tobacco, in the languid heat of a room with velvet-curtained windows, padded doors, and a wood fire. He had sympathised with his friend's dreams, and had been proud of his success—had believed in him as the poet of the future, an undeveloped Musset, a Victor Hugo in the bud.

Was Monsieur de Valnois at home? he asked. No, the

porter told him. Monsieur had gone out half an hour ago, doubtless only for a short time, since he had left no instructions. His key was there. Would Monsieur like to go up and wait in the *salon?* The porter knew Ishmael as a familiar friend of Valnois, who had a very easy way with all his friends, and, in his small way, kept open house, as it were. His hospitality was a question of coffee and cigarettes—of a glass of fine champagne or vermouth; but it was freely given always. Men were going in and out of his rooms all the afternoon, and in the evening he went out himself, to return long after the porter's first sleep. This early exit of to-day was an altogether exceptional event.

'I don't know what fly has stung him,' said the porter, when Ishmael had gone upstairs with the key, 'to go out at seven o'clock in the morning.'

The porter's wife shook her head.

'He took a portmanteau with him last night, and he told me he should be away at least a week,' she said. 'I believe that he lost the train, and that there was someone with him when he came back. I caught a glimpse of a figure slipping round the corner of the stairs while Monsieur Valnois stood waiting for his candle and key, and I believe it was a woman.'

Such a thing could not be, protested the porter. It was not within the limits of belief that any impropriety of that species could be enacted under *that* roof, he being there to defend the sanctity of that honourable house—a house which was still rich in the relics of saintly occupation, a house which had been the dwelling-place of a Monseigneur, a Prince of the Church, whose violet robes had swept those passages. No, the porter could not think it. He knew that Monsieur de Valnois was lax in his notions even to the verge of Bohemianism; but, however broad a man's ideas might be, he must know how to respect a house in the Rue de Grenelle, between courtyard and garden, a house of the old nobility.

While the porter and his wife were arguing this point Ishmael opened the door on the *entresol*, and went into his false friend's *salon*. He had some idea of waiting for him there—hearding him in his own den. He half expected to find his guilty wife there in hiding. He had hardly considered yet what those two sinners were likely to do, and how improbable it was that Valnois would attempt to hide another man's wife in his lodgings—how much more likely that they two would fly far from Paris, from France even.

And yet it must needs be difficult for Valnois to expatriate himself. He lived by his pen, the pen of the journalist, the ephemeral writer, who treats of subjects fresh in the minds of

men, the novelties of the day—like the *articles de Paris* in the shops on the Boulevard—who catches folly as it flies.

Ishmael stood in the midst of the room motionless, his eyes flaming with anger, like a tiger in his den. The atmosphere was hot and close, tainted with sickly odours of jockey club, the last fashionable perfume, of coffee and wine. The velvet curtains hung over the narrow windows; there were embers still glowing on the hearth, a scent of burning wood. The table was scattered with the *débris* of a hasty meal—a dainty little china coffee-pot, and Oriental cups and saucers, half a bottle of claret without a cork, a couple of glasses, the remains of a perigord pie in a terrine, a damask napkin flung upon the table, half burnt cigarettes and ashes scattered among plates and glasses—confusion—disorder—the indications of a meal *à l'improviste*—two chairs pushed from the table opposite each other.

Ishmael plucked aside the velvet curtain and flung open the window, stifled in that tainted atmosphere, charged with perfumes and wine, and the faded air of a closed room. De Valnois had not been alone last night. He had supped in company. What if the company were still there?

The door of the next room stood ajar. Ishmael listened for a sound from within, were it only the half-suppressed breathing of a terrified woman. But there was nothing—not a breath. He heard the orderly footfall of a gendarme on the pavement of the street, the distant cry of a hawker, the bass roll of heavy wheels far off in the awaking city, and the clink, clink, clink of the mason's hammer yonder in the Place Bellechasse, but from within not a sound. And yet he could not believe that the room was empty. She was there—she held her breath—she waited, aware of his presence—hiding, praying for her lover's return—hoping that of those two one would be slain, and that one her husband. He threw open the door and went in. Oh, what a dainty room!—all the prettinesses, and conceits, and follies of a *petit maître*, the abbé of Louis Quinze, the *incroyable* of the Directory, the *gandin* of the Empire—the fopling and spendthrift of all time—the same always. Then a wild rage seized upon the strong man. He laughed long and loud with the harsh, horrible laughter of a distraught brain. When man's evil passions come to boiling point, they have a power to intoxicate compared with which the drunkenness of wine or of opium is a feeble thing.

'Are you there, pretty one?' he cried. 'Yes, I understand now why you chose this one rather than me—for his fine clothes, his dainty ways, his white hands, his perfumes and kid gloves, his amber-handled his canes, velvet collar and varnished boots—those are the qualities for which women like you value the things you call men. Come out of your hiding-place, *infâme*.

She was not there; but, as a fatal sign and token of her guilt, trailing over the back of a chair, hung the cashmere shawl which her husband had given her in the first flush of his growing prosperity—the dark red shawl with its Indian border of palm-leaves. How proud he was the day he bought it for her in the great shop on the Boulevard des Capucines! What delight when he unfolded the shawl and wrapped it round his wife's graceful shoulders! He could recall her little cry of rapture even now as he stood white with rage before this damning proof of her shame. Was she not there even yet, there in hiding? The shrouded alcove with its curtains of damask and lace mingled in an artistic confusion—massive, sweeping folds of crimson brocade half hidden under a foam of old Flemish *guipure:* plenty of covert here for guilt to hide in. Ishmael plucked savagely at the luxurious drapery—plucked it once, twice, thrice, till he wrenched the curtain from its hold and left the slender fabric of gilded woodwork bare. Then, with one sledge-hammer blow of his clenched fist, he smashed the baldaquin, which tottered and fell to pieces like a barley-sugar temple. No, there was no one hiding in the sybarite's alcove. But the rage of destruction had taken hold of Ishmael. There were no bounds to his passionate scorn of all this finery, this unmanly luxury, which seemed the outward visible sign of hidden vices. There were no bounds to his hatred of the man who had deceived and dishonoured him. He kicked over the slender *marqueterie* toilet-table, all smiling with loves and graces, and comedy masks, and garlands of roses, and cloven-footed satyrs lurking among Cupids. He set his heel upon the mirror which had reflected that false face. He hurled over the fragile *bonheur du jour* in amber-tinted satinwood and ormolu, lined with sky-blue moire, stuffed with love letters, loaded with *bibelots* in porcelain, gold, and ivory. The work of destruction lasted but a few minutes, during which Ishmael, in that chaos of *bric-à-brac*, dashed about him like a wild beast in a jungle. When all was done, he rushed from the room, leaving behind him a trail of shattered furniture, a confusion of ivory hair-brushes, broken perfume-bottles, papers, books, neckties, opera hats strewed over the Persian carpet like the *débris* of an earthquake.

It had given him a transient relief to work this ruin—just as a man with a racking toothache is solaced for an instant or so by dashing his head against a wall. But when the thing was done he was no nearer real revenge than he had been before. He had only gratified the fierce rage of the moment.

He went back to the little *salon*, white, breathless, after that convulsion of anger. He sat down at the table, and, among

bottles and glasses and the fragments of last night's meal, he wrote with a pencil on a leaf torn from his pocket-book :

'I came here to kill you if I could, or to be killed by you. I will not rest day nor night till the wrong you have done me has been washed out with blood—yours or mine. Do not think to escape me in France or out of France. The sea is not wide enough to part us. The world is not big enough to hold us both. Go where you will, I can follow. My father killed the man who stole his wife. I am a stronger man than my father, and I have less to lose. If it is in our race—an hereditary doom—to be unhappy in our wives, it is also in our race to revenge our wrongs. Where will you meet me, and when? Let it be at once—the sooner the better—lest I should have time to forget myself and strike you in the open street. I should not like to do that, for you once saved my life ; but it is well you should know I am a desperate man.'

He stuck his challenge in the frame of the looking-glass, where it could hardly fail to catch de Valnois' eye on his entering the room. The other side of the glass was choked with notes, cards, invitations ; but this side was clear save for that ominous scrawl roughly written in a big, firm hand.

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## CHAPTER XXVI

### 'THEIR ROOTS SHALL BE AS ROTTENNESS

THE fly was waiting under the *marquise* in the quiet old court-yard which had seen so many entrances and exits ; but, perhaps, among all goings in and comings out, even of stately hearse with violet velvet trappings and nodding plumes, and solemn *croque-morts*, and bare-headed mourners, none more ominous, more tragical than this departure of Ishmael in the quiet autumn morning with the hot thirst for blood in his heart. The whole nature of the man seemed to have changed within a couple of hours. The deadly pallor of his face, the sombre fire in his eyes altered his outward aspect almost past recognition ; but the transformation within was much more awful, and he himself was keenly conscious of this change within himself presently as he drove past the church of St. Clotilde, and heard that clink of the mason's hammer which had been the music of his daily life, the rhythm of happy labour, and bethought himself that it never

more could have the same cheery sound in his ears. There would always be a hideous memory coming between him and his daily work.

He had loved these two, and trusted them implicitly without a thought of possible evil, had believed in them as he believed in God—first in the woman whom he had saved from a life of sordid misery, next in the man, his friend, who had given him a refuge and shelter from the hail of bullets on the night of the barricades—the man whom he reverenced as a genius, a creature of a superior clay, a being to whom falsehood and treachery must needs be impossible. And this woman had forsaken him, and this man had dishonoured him. The demon that was awakened in his soul made him a new man. He felt the change in his own nature—felt this awakening of evil passions, and wondered at his own wickedness.

'Would it be murder to kill him if we two were together and alone?' he asked himself. 'If it were three times murder, I should do it. God keep me from meeting him till we can face each other on fair terms. I could not hold my hand. If I had found him in that silken nest yonder, I should have slain him with my clenched fist, or beaten in his brains with the first weapon that came to my hand. I can understand now how murder comes about.'

He told the man to drive to the Rue Franch-colline. He wanted to see Lisette, and to get from her any knowledge which she might have of his wife's flight. She must know something; and, be it much or little, it was for him to drag that knowledge out of her. She would lie, of course. She had been trained in the right school for that, he thought, bitterly. After this should have been done, he had to think of seconds for that meeting which he believed that Valnois would accord him. His acquaintances of the clubs belonged to the working classes for the most part; but there were among them a sprinkling of journalists, *littérateurs* in a small way, men who lived or starved by their pens—and such as these de Valnois, Bohemian and journalist, could not refuse to meet. There was no chance of finding these men till the evening, and in the meantime it was his false wife whom he wanted to find.

The Rue Franch-colline was very quiet at this hour. Everybody who had any work to do in central Paris had gone to do it, leaving this world of the outskirts dull and empty of aspect. The *charcuterie* had its usual ornamental air, an example of decorative art as applied to the varieties of pig-meat—dainty knuckles of ham in pink paper frills, golden with breadcrumb, or shining with rich brown glaze, festoons of sausages or black-pudding, sardine boxes, pies in crockery cases, truffled cutlets

ready for the frying-pan, cheeses savouring of distant provinces, reminding the exile of his native *bourg*, breathing the odours of rural muck-heaps and arcadian pig-styes. The *charcutier* was sitting in a corner of his shop, spelling out a newspaper, waiting the cheerful hour of the midday *pot-au-feu*, the fumes of which stole gratefully to his nostrils from an adjacent kitchen. Ishmael went straight to the first floor with only a passing glance at Monsieur Moque. He went up the wretched little staircase screwed into a corner of the shabby old house, where all had been sacrificed to the width and grandeur of the shop, and knocked at the door of Lisette's apartment, tolerably sure of finding her at home at this hour of the morning.

She did not cry to him to come in with her usual shrill readiness ; but after a pause of at least a couple of minutes, she opened the door and appeared on the threshold in a *peignoir* of dubious freshness, a *peignoir de fatigue*.

'You, Monsieur Ishmael ! Great Heaven, you are back, then, and so soon.'

'So soon, and yet too late,' he said. 'Yes, I came back at daybreak this morning, and I have come to ask you what you have done with my wife ?'

'What I have done ?' cried Lisette, with a slightly over-accentuated air of surprise. 'Why, Pâquerette is safe and sound at home, I suppose. Where else should she be ?'

'She has left her home for ever. She has boldly avowed her guilt. There is another man whom she loves as she never loved me. That was all a mistake, a delusion. She has taken more than two years to discover her error of judgment ; but the revelation is complete now that it has come. And she has left me to follow the lover she prefers. You must have known this, Lisette—you must have seen this coming. You women have the eyes of a hawk for each other's follies ; and a woman is not demoralised all at once. Pâquerette was pure and true when I married her, pure and true when she wept for our dead child. How has the change come ? Why ? I have never ill-treated her—I have always been the same to her.'

Lisette shrugged her shoulders with a provoking air of knowing the world and being above it, indifferent and superior to the pains, and follies, and sins of other people by force of experience, as a cynic philosopher of a century old might have been.

'Who knows how these changes come, ever ?' she said. 'They always happen unawares. Yes ; we all know how good you were to your wife. The same always—perhaps too much the same. The men women like best are the men who beat them one day and take them on their knees and call them by pet

names the next. We want emotions, we others. We want to tremble and to weep sometimes, and to be soothed and consoled. Would you care for your dinner, do you think, if you were never hungry? You treated your wife as if she was a little girl, giving her nice gowns and plenty of pocket money, taking her for a treat on a Sunday, and leaving her to herself all the week, while your head was stuffed with diagrams, and whcels, and figures, and bridges, and markets. That is not the way to deal with a woman if you want to keep her fond and faithful.'

'Yes, I was a fool,' cried Ishmael, 'a besotted fool. I had so many things to think of, I was so eager to make my way in the world. And yet Heaven knows I was fond of her.'

'After your fashion, which is a cold fashion,' retorted Lisette.

'Tell me,' said Ishmael, growing angry again after that brief interval of softer feeling. 'You know where she is—where he is—where they two are together. Is it in Paris? Is it far away? Wherever it is, I have sworn to find them.'

'And if you find them, what then?'

'There will be bloodshed—death for one, or both, or all three. My life is ruined. It is like a building—brave, and new, and smiling in the sunshine; and because of some flaw in the foundation, some weakness in a main wall, the whole structure crumbles in a moment, in a flash, and falls into ruin. I care not who may perish in that ruin. Be sure that *all* shall not escape.'

'You are going too fast, *mon enfant*,' said Lisette, looking at him with a compassionate air almost as she had looked at him in the wretchedest hour of his childhood when they lived in that miserable barrack near the cemetery. 'First, I do not know that your wife has run away from you; secondly, I do not know with whom she has run away; thirdly, I do not know where she is; fourthly, I do not know where he is. Now, then, are you content?'

'No,' answered Ishmael, roughly; 'I am not content, because I do not believe you. I have the avowal of my wife's guilt in her own handwriting; I have seen the evidence of her shame an hour ago in Monsieur de Valnois' apartment—her shawl, my gift, trailing in the slime of that profligate den.'

'A shawl here or there proves nothing; they make such shawls as that by the hundred,' said Madame Moque, unable to conceal her contempt for a cashmere of five hundred francs, she who had enjoyed the reversion of an Indian shawl that cost five thousand.

'I tell you I know,' said Ishmael; 'the proof is here,' striking his breast. 'It was the instinct of my own heart which told me at once where to seek for the traitor.'

He stood looking round the room with stern, scrutinising eyes, as if even here he might find some fresh evidence of his wife's infamy—the room to which he brought her nearly three years ago, a flower plucked out of the gutter, a brand snatched from the burning.

Madame Moque's *salon* had not yet assumed its *bourgeois* primness. There were traces of last night's supper, there was a work-table heaped with old finery in course of reproduction, for the chief occupation of Lisette's daily life was to recompose her gowns and bonnets, to curl feathers and revivify cambric roses, and clean old silks and satins. Altogether, the room had an air of exceeding slovenliness. The yellow curtains were drawn closely across the alcove, doubtless to conceal the disordered couch within.

'You need not turn up your nose at my *salon*,' said Lisette, with a vexed air. 'One cannot have oneself and one's room *tirées à quatres épingles* at nine o'clock in the morning.'

Nine o'clock! was it so early? It seemed to Ishmael as if he had lived through a long day since he turned the key in the door of his lodging yonder—that door outside which Pâquerette had crouched in the gray winter morning, so piteous, so humble, so grateful for a little kindness.

'I was not looking at your *salon*. I was only wondering—— '

'What?'

'If you had hidden my wife here.'

'*Pas de danger*. She has something better to do if she has gone off with her lover than to come and hide herself here. I daresay, if it is as you say, they have gone to Havre, and are on board ship by this time, bound for the New World. If I had run away from my husband, I would not stay in the old one. *Pas si bête!*'

'The yare not so wise as you,' retorted Ishmael, grimly. 'They were in the Rue de Grenelle last night—I saw her shawl there, I saw the relics of their feast. They were there last night. He left the house only half an hour before I entered it. When she left it, or how, I cannot tell you. I was too late.'

'If you had found her——,' faltered Lisette, looking at him curiously.

'If I had found her—an hour ago—feeling as I felt then, I should have killed her,' he answered; and there was no doubt as to the strength of his own conviction upon this point.

'What good would that do except to make a dreadful end of your life yonder?' said Lisette, gloomily, with a motion of her head towards *la grande Roquette*. 'Life is troublesome enough for all of us, but one does not want to cut it short by spitting in the basket.'

This was the popular manner of hinting at the guillotine.

'It would have mattered little to me how my life ended just now if I had had my way,' said Ishmael. 'There is a kind of thirst that must be slaked at a crimson fountain. If I had missed him, and she had come in my way, I should have slain her—poor miserable thing that she is. And now, Lisette, once and for all,' he went on, putting his two strong hands upon the woman's plump shoulders with an iron grasp, holding her as in a vice, and looking into her face with eyes that tried to read her soul, 'you know something about this—much, if not all. You have been her chief companion; you have been with her at the Opera; I trusted her with you; she has been your guest here, in this room; they two together, perhaps—God knows—encouraged and protected in their treachery by you——'

'How dare you say such things?'

'You *must* know where they are. Tell me, that I may find him. I am cooler now. I promise you—yes, on my oath—that I will spare her. I will not lift my hand against her. But with him—I only want to be fair and square with him—man to man—face to face—hand against hand. Tell me—tell me—tell me!'

Lisette was ashy pale, and trembled a little in that firm grip. Those fiery eyes looking into hers seemed to burn into her brain. Something she must tell him to satisfy him—no matter what lie so long as it might for one hour pass for truth.

'I have only heard a word here and there,' she gasped, with a faltering, a reluctance that belonged to the highest dramatic art. 'You don't suppose they would tell *me* what they meant to do—me, your friend. I heard them whispering together in the corner of an opera box the other night. I could not believe that there was anything wrong. I thought they were both in jest—talking mere nonsense. It was not till you came here just now—till you told me that she had left you—that she had been in the Rue de Grenelle—it was only that instant the whole truth dawned upon me. He was talking to her about Brazil—a paradise, he said, where one could live for a little money—live as in the Garden of Eden. If she has fled with him, I feel convinced they will go to Brazil. You had better go to Havre if you want to waylay them.'

To Havre! Yes; it was thence the great ships set sail for Southern America. He had thought of them and dreamed of them often in his boyhood, when he felt that he was one too many at Pen-Hoël, and fancied that it would be a glorious thing to make his escape to some larger and wilder region where he might live by his gun, where he could catch a horse and ride it unbroken over a world that would be for ever new. Havre! yes; he ought to be at the station now, watching for the departure of those vile fugitives, rather than fooling here.

He left Lisette without a word, and drove to the house he lived in, where he saw Madame Morice, told her that he expected a gentleman to call upon him in the course of the day on very important business, and begged her to be on the alert for any such visit. The charwoman portress counted for nothing in the way of intelligence, and was rarely on the spot when wanted. Madame Morice would kindly tell the stranger that Monsieur Ishmael would be at home at five o'clock that afternoon to receive any one who should favour him with a call at that hour. Having thus provided against the chance of an answer to his challenge, he drove to the railway station in the Rue Saint Lazare, at which he had arrived on the dawn of that fatal day.

The station was not so crowded in 1854 as it is nowadays; but it was the season of sea-bathing, and a good many families were leaving Paris, frightened away by the talk of the cholera. The mid-day train was filling for Havre, Dieppe, Rouen as Ishmael entered the station. He had just time to make his way to the platform—a matter of difficulty, since he was not furnished with a ticket—on pretence of seeing a friend who was to start by that train. He had time to pass along the platform, peering into the crowded carriages to see the children on their mother's laps, the white-capped *bonnes*, the babies, the bonnet-boxes, poodles, adipose fathers, overgrown collegians, all feverish and loquacious with the rapture of leaving somewhere to go somewhere else. He looked into every carriage; but there was no sign of Hector de Valnois or his victim.

He saw the train move slowly and ponderously out of the station like a thing to which velocity was impossible, and then he went back to the booking office and inquired about the next train for Havre. There was none till eight in the evening. He was free to do what he liked with himself till that hour—free to go back to his desolate rooms and wait for his false friends' answer to his challenge—free to break his fast, which had not been broken by meat or drink since midnight.

When the door closed upon Ishmael, Lisette turned the key sharply in the lock and drew a long breath with the air of one who has just escaped from a great danger. She went over to the alcove, and plucked aside the yellow damask with the triumphant manner of a woman who feels herself equal to the most tremendous occasion.

'There, I have got you out of it,' she cried; 'but do not give me that kind of thing to do too often, Madame Ishmael.'

Crouching like a hunted doe upon the little yellow damask sofa that had served her as a bed in the days of her girlhood, Pâquerette looked up at her protectress with pallid countenance and eyes large with terror. She had fled there for safety in the

early morning, stealing out of the house *entre cour et jardin* on tip-toe before it was light, her lover opening the doors as cautiously as a practised burglar, lest the porter or his wife should be awakened by the scrooping of a bolt, or should discover that the sanctity of that aristocratic mansion had been violated by the shelter of a *pas grand' chose* like Pâquerette in the dead of the night. She had come to Lisette's house before daybreak, and had begged for shelter there till the evening, when she was to start with Hector for the sunny South, by the mail train for Bordeaux, on the way to the Pyrenees. It had been the dream of the journalist's life to cross the Pyrenees—to see Madrid and Cordova, Seville, Granada, the world of Alfred de Musset and Murillo, the world that seems to have been invented for poets and painters; and to take Pâquerette with him made the fulfilment of that long-cherished dream so much the sweeter. Unhappily, Monsieur de Valnois had a habit of mind and body which he believed to be a part of the poetic temperament—a man must needs have the *défauts de ses qualités*. He could never be in time for any appointment with man or woman. Unpunctuality was engrained in him. Thus, having planned to meet Pâquerette in the station on the Boulevard de l'Hôpital in time for the Bordeaux mail, he arrived there just ten minutes after the train had started, and found Pâquerette in the great bleak waiting-room, pale with fright. What was she to do? Where was she to go? She wanted to fly from Paris, to be beyond the reach of her angry husband. She had left a letter on the chimney-piece telling him of her flight. He would be back early next morning. He had told her so in his letter received that afternoon.

'You should not have written about these follies,' said Hector, reproving her in his airy way as if she had been a foolish child. 'There is never any need to confess one's sins except to the priest. What shall we do since the train is lost really and truly? Will you go back to your lodgings and burn the letter, and take some more convenient time for our flight?'

He had a knack of putting off things; and was not in any wise a man of action.

But Pâquerette declared she would not go back to that abandoned home of hers for worlds. Who could tell? Ishmael might be there already; he might have read her letter—he might be there waiting for her like a wild beast in a cage. She reminded her lover, also, that all her worldly goods were in the railway station, packed in the two portmanteaux which he had bought for her that morning. Every step had been taken for their flight except, on Hector's part, that one detail of being in time for the train.

'If you will not go back to your own apartment, there is no alternative but to come with me to mine,' said de Valnois, after a minute's reflection; 'but I shall have to take you past the porter unawares, for he is a curious person with a prejudice against your too enchanting sex.'

And now, in the chill daylight, the dread to-morrow, the time of reflection, of remorse, of passionate, unavailing regret, Ishmael's wife was in hiding with her friend and confidante Lisette Moque. Yes; Madame Moque knew everything: had tried to stem the torrent of guilty passion; had given good advice *par dessus la tête*, but had never refused to go to the Opera with the lovers, to eat ices at Tortoni's, or to sup at a popular restaurant. She had seen them sliding down the fatal slope, had tried to pluck them back, and, failing that, deemed it a virtue in herself that she had not abandoned them in their sin—that she was ready to be their friend still in spite of everything.

It had been a week of fever, the time of Ishmael's absence. The Palais de Cristal was closed for a general painting, and smartening, and restoration. Lisette had been free to go where she liked with Pâquerette. Ah, what drives they had had in the moonlight, the great harvest moon shining upon them, seeming to countenance their guilty love by that plenitude of glory. The perfect beauty of those September nights seemed a part of their being. What had they to do but love each other in a world where all was so lovely—to love as the birds love; to turn to each other with tremulous lips, impelled they knew not how, as the wind-driven flowers seemed to kiss each other in the woodland?

And then it was a season of terror and strange excitement, this year of war and pestilence. From afar there came the tidings of conquest and bloodshed, and men's minds were on the alert, expectant of a mighty victory yonder, a victory the news of which was to convulse Paris only a few days later. And while far away in the East the sky was red with the fierce light of battles, here at home there was the darkness of the grave, and men's talk was of sudden death. Those who were glad and well yesterday were stricken to-day, would be carried to the grave to-morrow. Who could tell where the hand of the slayer would fall next? One lived on the brink of a precipice. Not to be happy to-day was, perhaps, to lose all chance of bliss for ever. To-morrow one might be lying under the cold, damp ground—out of sight of yonder mellow moon—a prey for the conqueror worm.

Perhaps it was this fever in the air, this breath of the pestilence and ever-present terror of death, that impelled Pâquerette's light feet to the edge of the abyss, that made her

oblivious of honour, duty, gratitude, truth, religion, for the sake of a low voice breathing poetic words in her ear, a gentle hand toying with her hair, eyes that looked into hers, shining like twin stars under the starlight. Oh, happy nights, which seemed as innocent as the loves of Titania and her sister-elves, yet meant the ruin of two lives, a blight upon two young souls. How sweet they were! How sweet amidst the glades of Saint-Germain, in the lamp-lit supper-room at the Henri Quatre; the scent of mignonette and roses wafted in from the old-fashioned garden, the forest showing dark and mysterious yonder, only a little way from the open windows: happy hours so lightly spent in the arrowy flight of mirthful words, of half-veiled avowals of love, across the lighted table: happy drives back to Paris, when the chill breath of morning began to steal across the deepening dark of night, and Pâquerette nestled closer to her lover's side for warmth and comfort, cherished by that encircling arm, hoping that she might die there after a brief dream of bliss.

Her sin looked of a different colour this morning as she crouched, still trembling for fear of her angry husband, in the shadow of the yellow curtains.

'What would have become of you, I wonder, if I had been as wanting in tact as you and that Monsieur of yours have shown yourselves?' demanded Lisette. 'Figure to yourself, then, a man who cannot be in time for the train even when he is eloping with another man's wife! However, thanks to my presence of mind, your husband will be cooling his heels at the Saint-Lazare station, watching all the departures for the West, while you and Monsieur de Valnois are leaving the Boulevard de l'Hôpital for the South—provided this clever gentleman does not contrive to lose the train again to-day.'

'He will not do that,' said Pâquerette. 'He is as anxious to get away from this horrible city as I am.'

She shuddered as she spoke of the great city as if its very atmosphere were pervaded by her husband's anger—that thirst for vengeance which meant death for her lover, if not for her too.

'Oh! Monsieur de Valnois is anxious to leave Paris, you say. But why?'

'On account of his debts.'

'Oh, he is in debt, is he? And is that the capital with which you two are to begin life, *là bas?*'

'How do you mean?'

'I mean, what are you going to live upon in the South? Travelling costs money; eating and drinking cost money: even lovers are sometimes hungry.'

'Oh, we shall have plenty of money,' answered Pâquerette, confidently, as if the matter needed no discussion. 'You know

how clever Hector is. He can always live by his pen—at the other end of the world just as well as in Paris. He has nearly finished a second volume of poems, ever so much finer than the first, for which he was paid so handsomely. The new book will bring him a great heap of money, and will increase his reputation as a poet.'

'I hope so,' said Lisette, to whose strictly *bourgeoise* temper the prospect did not appear particularly inviting.

Poetry was all very well, but she would have preferred something more solid, more commercial—a new mustard, a lucifer match, an article of daily consumption that all the world might buy.

'He is to call for me in a *rémise* at a quarter past eleven,' said Pâquerette, looking at the clock with an anxious air. 'It is ten minutes past by your clock. Is that right?'

'Rather slow. It is over the quarter by the right time.'

'*Mon Dieu*,' cried Pâquerette, in an agony; 'if he should lose the train again!'

'I hope he won't,' said Lisette, coolly; 'but he is a poet, and poets have their own ideas about time and money.'

Pâquerette came out of the little alcove, tremulous, pale with apprehension, and put on her bonnet before the glass above the mantelpiece—a neat little black lace bonnet with a wreath of violets. Small bonnets had only just come into fashion, and they were very small. The Empress had her lovely golden hair for ornament, and all other women in civilised Europe, whether with or without golden hair, were content to copy the Empress's headgear. They had not yet begun to dye their own hair in imitation of that lovely arbitress of fashion. Pâquerette had a little black lace mantle for her shoulders over her gray silk gown. It was only within the last six months she had aspired to silk gowns.

'How horrible I look!' she said, scared by the expression of her face.

'You look like a lady. The cut of that gown is perfect, though it was made by a poor little half-starved workwoman in a garret,' answered Lisette, surveying her friend with a critical eye. 'Hark! there is the *rémise*. You and Monsieur de Valnois have your luggage all at the station—nothing to do but take your tickets and get your places in the train.'

She and Pâquerette ran downstairs. A close carriage was waiting before the door with Hector in it. He had been about Paris all the morning, whipping up a little money from his employers in the literary line; making engagements to send letters from Spain to one of his papers, to do Spanish articles occasionally for his magazine; discussing the terms upon which

his new volume of poems was to be produced, and keeping as much as possible out of the way of his creditors—the upholsterer, the *bric-à-brac* dealer, the tailor, hatter, perfumer, hosier, print-seller, tobacconist—astonishing how many trades came into play to provide the mere necessities of a fine gentleman's existence. And now he had fifteen hundred francs in his pocket, and was ready to start. There was not a moment to lose.

He had not been back to the Rue de Grenelle. He had not seen the havoc that had been made with the furniture, or the challenge in the chimney-glass.

He handed Pâquerette into the carriage, and then looked out to shake hands with Lisette.

'We are off to the sunny South,' he said, 'far away from wars and rumours of wars. We shall never come back to this worn-out town, where there is not a breeze that has not been poisoned by the breath of man. Think of us kindly, Madame Moque.'

Lisette, touched on that sentimental side of her nature which had stood a good deal of hard wear, was moved to tears. Her husband, more practical and not less kindly, came out of his shop with a neat little white paper parcel, tied with the daintiest red tape, such a parcel as one only sees in Paris.

'You will be hungry on the journey,' he said. 'I have made you a sandwich or two—boar's head with pistachios.'

He put his little gift into Hector's hand, and nodded a friendly farewell. Lisette ran into the road as the carriage drove away, took off one of her well-worn slippers and flung it after the vehicle. She had forgotten for the moment that this departure was not entitled to all the honours of a wedding party.

## CHAPTER XXVII

### 'THE ROD HATH BLOSSOMED, PRIDE HATH BUDDED'

It was the springtide of 1867, year of the gathering of the nations in the great circular glass-house of the Champs de Mars, with its gardens, and fountains, and external dependencies, all to be reproduced on a more gigantic scale eleven years later, just as this crystal palace of Sixty-seven was a reproduction and extension of the old Palace of Industry yonder in the Champs Elysées. But people talked of this exhibition as of something unsurpassed and unsurpassable, the culmination and ultimate evolution of the system of International Exhibitions. The nations, the newspapers, had been full of rumours about it for the last half a year. It would be finished—it would not be finished—at the appointed time. It would be opened on the very day that had been named—it would not be open till the end of the summer. Paris was on tip-toe; England was expectant, but doubtful—those frivolous creatures have no head for business, never are ready with anything, said sturdy John Bull; America was in a fever, and all that was most distinguished in New York, Boston, Washington, Chicago was already on the high seas.

There was one person in Paris who was utterly indifferent to the opening or non-opening of the monster glass-house on the first of April; one person who thought the whole business an intolerable bore, the clink of hammers, the grinding of wheels a burden and a weariness; and that was a lady who lived in a white-walled villa in one of the new avenues just beyond the Arc de Triomphe, and who told her friends, with a shrug and a sigh, that her house had only one fault, and that was being much too near Paris.

This singular person, who did not care for international exhibitions, was a rich widow, Lady Constance Danetree, born in the purple, the daughter of an Irish marquis, married early to a man of old family and large wealth, left a childless widow in her twenty-third year, and now, in her twenty-sixth, leading a life of perfect independence in this brilliant Imperial Paris, where she knew all the best people and a few of the worst, the white and the black threads being curiously interwoven in the woof and warp of Imperial society—society bent on pleasure as on the chief good in life, society debased and enfeebled by an

excessive luxury, corrupted by ill-gotten wealth—society which has been compared to Holbein's Dance of Death around the altar of the golden calf.

'*Che carnivale!*' exclaimed an Italian diplomatist on first beholding that glittering Court of the Tuileries; and for the lighter portion of society this Imperial reign was verily one long carnival—an age of feasting and revelry, of dancing and masking; one long night of reckless mirth, upon which the morning came suddenly, cold, and bleak, and gray, the morning that saw Paris a beleaguered city, and her Emperor a discrowned exile.

Lady Constance Danetree's mother had been dead ten years. Her father was an eccentric old person, a tyrant of the first water. He lived on his Irish estate half the year, in a castle near the mouth of the Shannon, among a tenantry who hated him worse than the worst of absentees, and spent the other half in London, where his reputation had an odour of the notorious marquis best known to this generation as Lord Steyne, and of that other gentleman familiar in the literature of anecdote under the sobriquet of Old Q. As it was not possible Lady Constance could rejoice in the society of such a father, people hardly wondered that she should prefer Paris to London for residence, and the Riviera to Brighton for recreation.

She had married a rich man without loving him, not because she was poor, or because she was driven into his arms by paternal tyranny. Lord Kilrush was too indifferent to his daughter's destiny to play the tyrant in matters matrimonial. Lady Constance married the first respectable man who offered himself to her simply because she hated her home, and thought it a happier condition to be the wife of a man of honour, albeit she did not love him, than to be the only daughter of Lord Kilrush.

During her two years and a half of wedded life Lady Constance failed in no single duty, great or small. She made her husband's life supremely happy, so happy that Mark Danetree had no need to question the nature of his wife's regard for him. She was his good and true helpmeet, the pride of his heart, the glory of his home; and when fate snapped the thread of his days unawares by an accident in the hunting field, in a ditch on his father-in-law's estate, he died with his hand in hers, his pale lips murmuring broken words of gratitude for the blissful life she had given him.

Mark Danetree had been dead nearly four years; and people had almost forgotten that Lady Constance had ever been anything but a widow. This condition, with all its freedom and dignity, seemed her natural state. She was one of the queens of Parisian society, went where she liked, spent as much as she

liked, said what she liked, did what she liked; and it seemed to her friends in France as if she had been born so. They could not picture her in a state of bondage, bowing her neck to the yoke, accepting the mastery of father or husband.

'She's a delicious woman; but what a devil of a life she must have led Danetree!' said an Englishman who had never met her till the days of her widowhood. He would hardly believe the better-informed individual who tried to explain to him that Lady Constance's conduct as a wife had been perfect.

She was beautiful exceedingly, with the grand lines and rich colouring of a high-born Irishwoman. Her profile was classical, and the face, so perfect in modelling, so statuesque in its harmony, might have failed to touch the heart of man had it not been for those lovely Irish eyes of deep dark gray shaded by long black lashes.

'With such eyes as those a woman may do anything,' said a Parisian, discussing the lady at his *cercle* over the inspiring glass of absinthe *avec beaucoup de gomme*, which was the fashionable before-dinner stimulant. 'If some of our Cocodettes had those eyes, they would go further than they do.'

'*Pas possible*,' replied his friend; and, indeed, in those latter days of the Empire there were few extremities left for the great ladies of Paris to touch. They had *lived*, those grand ladies of the Imperial court: they had rubbed shoulders with the *demi-monde;* they had sat at the feet of Cora and her sisterhood. They dressed, they talked, they danced, they sang, after the women of whose very names they were supposed to be ignorant. Cora and the Empress divided the sovereignty of fashion; and to judge by the style of the women of that period, it would seem that Cora's influence had the wider range. The Empress was lovely, graceful, gracious, a woman of exquisite taste; but Cora had *chic*—Cora had the art of astonishing society. It was all very well for handsome women to mould themselves upon the refined manners of the Empress; but a woman of quality might be as ugly as sin and yet attract admiration if she only were bold enough to imitate Cora. It was Cora who first taught the women of Paris to enamel their faces, to paint their eyebrows and eyelids, to draw blue veins upon their alabaster foreheads, to wear a cascade of somebody else's hair flowing down their backs like a horse's tail. It was she who invented short petticoats, Polish boots, chaînes Benoîton. Zanita, the pale and elegant beauty of 1854, was dead and forgotten, and Cora reigned in her stead: and compared with Zanita's refined loveliness, Cora's coarser charms were as Rubens unto Raffaelle, or as Baudelaire to Musset. She was said to have received from

London a magical casket containing all the elements of beauty ; in any case, it was she who invented the *sexe maquillé.*

If change and progress and ever-increasing wealth had set their mark upon the time, death had not been idle. The ranks of the great had thinned since the days of Crimean victory. In the Lenten season of '64, after briefest illness, like a candle blown out by an unexpected gust of wind, there had vanished from the Imperial pageant one of the most important factors in the *coup d'état*, and, from a social standpoint, the most brilliant outcome of the Empire. This was de Morny, gentleman-financier, man of business to the tips of his fingers, manufacturer of beet-root sugar in the Puy-de-Dôme, picture-dealer in Russia, railway-speculator in France. In finance a genius ; as courtier and fine gentleman, patron of arts and letters, the stage, the opera, the finest type of the age which he adorned. He died, and left no lasting gap in the arena of public life ; but to that lighter world of pleasure, the world of balls and dinners, theatres and picture-galleries, boudoirs and *parties fines*, it was as if a star had gone down, and the horizon of life was so much the darker for that vanished glory.

Gone, too, Cavour, the modern Machiavel, the master-mind of Europe ; Palmerston ; Leopold of Belgium ; Pélissier. Great actors were departing from the stage of European politics ; but in the *coulisses* of diplomacy there lurked a figure which was soon to loom large upon the scene—Bismarck, the Prussian, upon whose broad shoulders Cavour's mantle was said to have fallen.

The Paris of to-day was a vastly different place from that city along whose dingy quays Ishmael had looked on a November evening in the year 1850. Seventeen years of enterprise, improvement, vast expenditure had made the old city into a new city, a place of broad boulevards piercing east and west, and north and south ; a place of mighty theatres, and newly-erected churches that were as gaudy in colour and gilding as a mediæval *châsse* or an Indian tomb ; a place of new bridges, rich in sculptured emblems, recalling the triumphs of French arms from Jena to Inkermann ; a place of parks and palaces, fountains and gardens, villas and avenues, with suburbs stretching far and wide, dotted about with those Swiss châlets, Norman châteaux, Italian villas, *maisonettes à la moyen-age, à la Renaissance*, with which the little shopkeeper who has saved money loves to disfigure the landscape around Paris. The old wish of the Parisian *bourgeoise* to possess a gable in the street has grown into the desire for a house and gardens at Asnières or Bellevue.

Opulence and luxury were the leading notes of the Imperial reign. The famous Mr. Spricht, the man-milliner patronised in the Tuileries, had built himself a palace with a fortune made

out of *chiffons*. Everywhere there appeared signs of universal prosperity. Among the poorest *arrondissements* of the city, amidst the vanishing slums of old Paris, gardens bloomed and fountains played as in an Arabian fairy tale. The enemies of the Emperor sneered at these glimpses of Eden in the midst of squalor, and grumbled that money was spent upon flowers and fountains which ought to have been expended on free schools; but in spite of these malcontents, Paris throve and rejoiced in the sunshine. Her hospitals, her charities of all kinds had attained a perfection only possible in a country where benevolence has been made a science. Everywhere, from the workman's boulevards yonder, Boulevard Richard Lenoir, Boulevard de la Villette, to the Italian palace of painter or princess, newly risen in the once shabby purlieus of the Parc Monceaux—westward, beyond the triumphal gate, where hills had been levelled and old streets carted away to complete the Parisian's paradise of avenues and villas, gardens, shrubberies, fishponds, cascades; eastward—southward—northward—everywhere the hand of improvement had been busy. Spade and pickaxe, hammer and chisel had created a new Paris—a Paris of tall white palaces, sculptured pediments, classic porticoes, Corinthian friezes, caryatides, ogee mouldings, brackets, festoons of fruit and flowers, repeating themselves in the same fresh stonework along an endless perspective—a Paris of intolerably long streets, and asphalte pathways that burnt the feet of the weary—a city of dissipation, pleasure, luxury, extravagance, and ruin—a gulf for men's fortunes, a pest-house for men's health, a grave for intellect, honour, manhood, religion—and quite the most delightful city in the world.

Lady Constance Danetree lived her own life in her perfect villa in the Bois, and troubled herself not at all about the follies or the vices of the great city yonder; and the breath of the pestilence left no taint upon her. The people she liked best and saw most belonged chiefly to the artistic classes. She was a woman of many tastes—painted, played divinely, sang a little, but only to her intimates, for her voice was an impassioned contralto with a *timbre* which seemed made to reveal the inmost feelings of the singer's heart. She never sang frivolous music, and she never sang before indifferent people. She read immensely, and liked to associate with her intellectual superiors. For her own class she cared little, as a class; but she had a few chosen friends belonging to the aristocracy of England and France; and in the houses of these friends she met the fashionable world of Paris, and saw Parisian life with all its absurdities, all its vices, all its caprices pass before her as a panorama, in which she was but faintly interested.

Her life, albeit she had some friends and a herd of acquaintances, was a lonely life ; but Constance Danetree did not dislike solitude. Perhaps any other woman in her place would have invited some maiden cousin to share her home, or would have hired a companion. But Lady Constance needed no sheep-dog to keep her in countenance ; and the perpetual society of any one person, however delightful, would have bored her intolerably. She opened the doors of her villa occasionally to her own or her husband's kindred, entertained her guest or guests regally for a week or two, showed them all that was worth seeing in Paris, made herself delightful to them in every way, and never breathed freely till her carriage had driven them off to the station.

In lieu of human companionship, which is apt to be obtrusive, Lady Constance had some canine friends, trained to an obedience so perfect, a sympathy so delicate, that their presence never wearied her. Her three friends were Lion, a superb colley, black and tan, with as much nobility in the form of his head as you would find in half the peerage ; Bijou, a soft white Pomeranian, with the eyes of a gazelle, and a tender melting nature which seemed always entreating to be loved ; and Skip, a very perfect being of the fox-terrier breed, with a pedigree as historic as a duke's. These three had the *entree* to every room in the villa, and had never jeopardised their privileges by bad behaviour ; but Bijou alone was allowed to accompany her mistress in her drives and shopping expeditions, as she alone possessed that repose of mind which reconciles a dog to lying on the back seat of a carriage as motionless and supine as the Esquimaux bearskin on which she reclines.

Lady Constance, reared in the south of Ireland, daughter and wife of mighty hunters, was a fine horsewoman, and kept a couple of hacks for her own riding—no groom was ever allowed to mount either. She rode every morning and in all weathers —rode early and far a-field ; and before noon she was generally established in her boudoir, reading, writing, practising, as the fancy seized her. She received her friends in the afternoon, and was one of the earliest to introduce into Parisian circles the thoroughly British institution of five o'clock tea ; *ce petit* five-o'clock lunch, as it was called by her French friends.

Upon this sunny afternoon in March, when the almond trees were coming into flower, and when tulips and hyacinths made a blaze of colour in Lady Constance Danetree's garden, her *salon* was not empty. Lady Valentine, her most particular friend, a clever matron of forty, a woman of the world in the best sense, had just dropped in for half-an-hour's chat before her drive round the Bois, bringing with her the last of her *protégés*, a

young Frenchman and a new poet. There is always a new poet in fashionable Paris. Every season has its chosen bard, declared by the unanimous voice of the dilettanti to be the coming man, author of a very thin little volume of thinner verse, printed on chalky paper, with carmine initials, and engraved tail-pieces—and of whom the French people at large never hear.

The Vicomte de Pontchartrian was the coming man in the *salons* of sixty-seven. He had published his little yellow volume—*Mes Râles*—and had accomplished a *succès fou* in half-a-dozen drawing-rooms between the Champs de Mars and the Place de la Concorde. His *Râles* were short detached lyrics—brief flights in the fashion of Heine—spasmodic—inconsecutive. His Pegasus had not the strong wing of Musset or Hugo, or even the calm narrative power, the somewhat languid grace of Lamartine. His flights were mere convulsions—short bounds into space, landing him nowhere in particular, or occasionally in an abyss of bathos. But as his verses were audaciously blasphemous, passionate, and charged with obscure meanings, the *femmes savantes* and the *précieuses ridicules* of Sixty-seven raved about him, fought for the privilege of having him at their parties, plied him with sweet cakes and tea, flatteries and sympathy, and did all in their power to feed a self-esteem which had long been the Vicomte's particular *bosse*. He was not the ideal poet of the *grisette* and the Quartier Latin. He did not wear his hair long, or affect the unconventional in costume. On the contrary, he dressed and demeaned himself with an extreme precision, studied mathematical exactness in his neckties and waistcoats, bought his hats in London, wore always the correct thing at the correct moment, and was as careful as if a hair's-breadth too much in the width of a collar, or the sixteenth of an inch in the length of a coat tail, would be sudden death to his pretensions. He was the true type of *petit crevé*, small, *chétif*, prematurely bald, with eyes that had faded in gaslighted rooms, a wan complexion, an aristocratic little nose, and a neat little moustache, so slender, so sparse, that the gummed points were as sharp as a pair of compasses. He was polite to punctiliousness, courteous, velvety. He affected the tone of Versailles and Marly in the days of the great King. If his sentiments were *louches*, his manners were irreproachable. Blasphemy was the leading note of his versification, but he had never been heard to swear. He had a little language of his own when he wanted to be abusive. He had a host of small originalities, infinitesimal inventions which passed for a great talent in that society of Sixty-seven.

But if the little Vicomte was a great man in the *salon* and the boudoir, he was a very small man in that republic of letters

which in these days held its *cénacle* sometimes after midnight on the ground floor of the Café Riche ; sometimes in that mystic chamber, number sixteen at the Café Anglais, known as the *Grand Seize Salon*, with flaming windows shining upon the boulevard and on the Rue de Marivaux, privileged apartment, where beauty, art, and literature supped gaily after the theatres were closed. How much that was brilliant and transient in the phantasmagoria of Paris shone, and sparkled, and lived its brief hour of delight in that famous supper room ! What wit, what gaiety, what reckless rapture in the present ! What cynical recklessness of the future ! How many are dead for whom the wine sparkled, and the lights burned in those nights of revelry ! How dim are the beauties whose charms were then in their noontide ! How altered and saddened is the world we live in ! Amongst the *grands viveurs*—Gortschakoff, Demidoff, Gramont-Caderousse, Raphaël Bischoffsheim, Daniel Wilson—the Vicomte de Pontchartrian was a minnow among the tritons, while among the greater lights of the literary firmament, Gautier, Augier, Dumas, Feuillet, Sardou, and the rest, the author of *Mes Râles* gave forth as feeble a glimmer as one of those attenuated tapers which are carried by white-robed maidens in the processions of a village church.

Lady Constance had other visitors this afternoon—Madame Jarzé, a large matron, and her two marriageable daughters—marriageable for the last few years, but still in full pursuit of eligible husbands. The father was an official of the Empire, a great man at Court, but with an income too small for the comfortable maintenance of such luxuries as a handsome wife and two attractive daughters. The elder girl, Hortense, disappointed and embittered already at four-and-twenty, had taken to literature, and set up for an *esprit fort*. She was among that modern Orphic society which expounded the mysteries of the new poet, pretended to understand him as no one else could, and was suspected of having set her heart upon marrying him. Amélie, the younger, who was very fair, very fresh, very pretty, but with a suspicion of artifice in the darkness of her lashes, the golden tints in her hair, affected the *genre bébé*, and was the more popular of the sisters. She wore innocent little hats, rather infantine gowns, and a crop of fluffy curls frizzling childishly all over her head at a period when other women wore Japanese chignons of satiny smoothness. Amélie suppressed her forehead, which was not devoid of intellect, and hoodwinked society with a shock of golden curls, which came down almost to her eyebrows, and imparted a charming simplicity, verging on silliness, to her *petit minois chiffoné*. To have a *petit minois chiffoné*, a *museau d'enfant gâté*, was Amélie's highest ambition.

Was not the *petit minois chiffoné* the favourite type yonder in the Quartier Breda, the region of Notre Dame de Lorette? The *petits museaux* drove the best horses in the Bois, and owned the prettiest victorias, and drove to the theatres in delicious little *coupés* hardly big enough to contain a crinoline and a cavalier.

The talk began naturally with the Exhibition, whether it would or would not be ready by the first of April, the biggest *poisson d'avril* which the Emperor had ever offered to his subjects. People talked of the circular show in the Champs de Mars just as they talk of the weather when there is no other stock subject ready to hand. All the kings and potentates were coming to Paris for the great industrial fair. From Egypt, from Turkey, from the far, far East they were to come. Old King William of Prussia, big with those late victories of his, swollen with the triumph of Sadowa, was to be there with his statesman Bismarck, and his general de Moltke, for whose tepid friendship Napoleon had sacrificed the interests of Austria by that neutrality which his best friend, the Queen of Holland, stigmatised as a blunder that was worse than a crime. The Emperor of all the Russias was coming. Paris was to bristle with sceptres. There were rumours that Victor Emmanuel would *not* come. There were some rather sharp letters passing just now between France and Italy. All friendships must come to an end. But the rugged chieftain of Savoy, the soldier of fortune, would hardly be missed amongst that crowd of crowned heads.

They talked of Mexico and her fated Emperor, over whom the shadows of calamity were darkening till all the horizon around him looked black as night. In the October of last year his personal possessions were on board an Austrian frigate. He had made all his plans for leaving Mexico to rejoin his afflicted wife in Belgium; but at the last moment his clerical counsellor, Father Fischer, aided by a letter from the Empress Eugènie, meant only to offer consolation for past reverses, had succeeded in rekindling the flame of ambition. New manifestos had been issued, more blood had been spilt, and now, in this March of Sixty-seven, General Bazaine and the French forces were on the high seas, while Maximilian, with a handful of faithful followers and an army of nine thousand troops, was, to all effects and purposes, a prisoner in the city of Queretaro, hemmed round by the Republican forces, which were growing daily stronger under General Escobedo.

'This is a sorry end to *la plus belle pensée du règne*,' said Lady Valentine, quoting one of the Emperor's flatterers. In those days there were only two sections in the political world—partisans who flattered grossly, enemies who slandered ruthlessly.

Truth had vanished from the political horizon. Everybody knew in his heart of hearts that the Imperial car was on the downward slope. The supremacy of France as the conqueror of Russia, the liberator of Italy, was over. Neutrality in Europe, failure in Mexico, had tarnished those laurels won in the past. A nation that would be great by arms must never leave the sword too long in the scabbard. Napoleon was trying in these latter days to realise that old promise made at Bordeaux almost on the eve of the Crimean War—'*L'Empire c'est la paix.*' But the attempted realisation worked ill, and it seemed that peace meant weakness. '*On peut tout faire avec des baïonnettes, excepte s'asseoir dessus,*' said Plon-Plon. 'The real loser at Sadowa was France,' said the astute among politicians; and it was to Germany that kings, sages, and people looked for the newly-rising star.

'And what has it cost us, *cette belle pensée?*' inquired Madame Jarzé.

'Oh, only a thousand millions or so in hard cash and credits, and—say, the tenth part of the *élite* of our army,' answered the Vicomte, who never exhibited any signs of emotion.

'But you have Marshal Bazaine coming back to you safe and sound,' said Constance; 'surely that is some compensation for your losses *là bas.*'

'We could have spared him better than a worse man,' replied the Vicomte, misquoting Shakespeare.

'Papa does not like Marshal Bazaine,' said Amélie; 'he thinks him a *pas grand' chose.*'

'I heard rather a good thing of one of our soldiers in Mexico,' interjected Pontchartrain. 'When the cholera was decimating our troops, this fellow wrote on the wall of the cemetery—*Jardin d'acclimatation.* Be sure that man was a Parisian.'

'Do you think that wit is a fruit of the Parisian soil, Vicomte?' asked Lady Constance.

'It may grow elsewhere, Madame, but it only ripens in Paris.

They had been talking for nearly half an hour, and not a word had been said about the Vicomte's poems. Hortense felt that he must be bored since the only subject that interested him was his own talent.

'I forget which of Monsieur de Pontchartrain's poems you told me impressed you the most, dear Lady Constance,' hazarded Hortense, hoping to lure her hostess into a eulogistic criticism.

Unfortunately, Constance had also forgotten. She leaned her dimpled chin upon her forefinger, not a weak chin by any means, but round and firm as marble. She reflected for a few moments, her dark-gray eyes grave and beautiful. The little Vicomte gazed upon her with as intense a look as those

pale orbs of his were capable of, gazed and thought what a heavenly way it would be out of all his difficulties if this lovely Englishwoman would marry him and let him have the spending of her fine fortune.

'Let me see,' said Constance; 'which of the poems most impressed me? Was it that one about the dead dog? So striking, so original! Two happy lovers are walking along a willow-shaded bank by the river in the summer twilight full of gaiety and hope, when they come suddenly upon a dead dog—a poor drowned corpse—bloated and noisome, and ravaged by crawling creatures that prey upon the dead. The description of that poor carrion is so exquisitely graphic! And they think that as that carrion is to-day so will they be a few years hence—a thing for worms and flies to feed upon—a source of foulness and pollution. Yes, I think, perhaps, that was the poem which startled me most.'

The Vicomte was delighted.

'You have divined my own thoughts,' he said; 'that lyric was *my* favourite. I wrote it with my heart's best blood.'

'What a nasty idea!' exclaimed Amélie, putting on her baby air, 'when ink is so clean and so cheap!'

'*Cruche*,' muttered her sister, angrily.

'Yes; it is a powerful poem—a little brutal, perhaps; but the brutal is now an essential element in poetry,' said Constance, musingly.

'And to think that the world once called Byron immoral,' exclaimed Lady Valentine—'Byron, who only shocked the sensitive upon one or two points. The modern school has gone so far beyond him in far-reaching esoteric immorality, that Byron has an air of having written with milk and water. And even in Byron's life-time Shelley went much further than he. It is the plain-speaking that offends, I think,' pursued her ladyship, who was strong-minded and of a ripe age, and who had no fear of touching a delicate subject. 'The man who calls a spade a spade is sure to shock people; but another man may hint in a subtle, between the lines way, at things that are infinitely worse than spades, and yet printers will print and publishers will publish without fear of consequences. By the bye, Vicomte, your verses remind me of a book I read last year—not a new book by any means—a book of poems published in the beginning of the Empire—*Mes Nuits Blanches*—by a certain Hector de Valnois—a very clever book—a book full of strong things mixed up with a few absurdities after the manner of your poets.'

Pontchartrain's countenance assumed the blankness of a stone wall. He had never heard of *Mes Nuits Blanches*. He doubted if the book had made any impression in literary circles.

'Strange,' exclaimed Lady Valentine; 'I should have thought you had read all the books of mark written within the century, and this really is a book of mark; and I am told was a good deal praised in its day. I wonder the writer never did anything more. Has nobody heard of this Monsieur de Valnois?'

Lady Constance had not, nor Madame Jarzé, who rarely read anything beyond the fashion magazines, the *Figaro*, and the *Journal pour Rire*.

'What a singular coincidence! It was only the other day that I heard of a man who was described to me as the author of *Mes Nuits Blanches*, a volume of verses which achieved a *succès fou* in its day,' cried Amélie, full of animation. 'Such a curious story. You know I am always stumbling upon curious stories.'

'Or inventing them,' muttered Hortense, with a sinister glance at her sister.

'You know M. de Kératry, that amusing young fellow who brought out a *vaudeville* at the Variétés last winter? It was he who told me all about this forgotten poet. He knows him intimately—in a kind of way.'

'What do you mean by "in a kind of way"?'

'Well, this poor man who wrote *Mes Nuits Blanches* has gone down in the world—he does not go into society any longer, lives in some wretched hole in the Quartier Latin, in some undiscoverable street behind the Luxembourg. But he was once a man of fashion, I believe—once handsome, once elegant.'

'Like the Vicomte's dead dog, he has had his day, and now he has come to the carrion stage, or nearly, I suppose,' said Lady Constance.

'Very nearly. I'm afraid, from Monsieur de Kératry's description of this poor thing's coat and hat, that he must be almost as badly off as the dog. He is a *teinturier*.'

'A dyer!' exclaimed Lady Valentine, with disgust. 'Those passionate verses written by a dyer, a man who dyes his dog red one day and yellow the next, and sends the poor brute into the street to advertise his master's last new dye. I have always hated Parisian dyers since I saw that yellow dog. I believe he was of the same breed as your Bijou, Constance. Think if such a fate were to befall her!'

'I do not mean a dyer of that kind,' said Amélie, scarcely concealing her scorn of Lady Valentine's ignorance. 'A *teinturier* in literary circles is a man who touches up—re-writes—or, in some cases, writes altogether—another author's pamphlet, or play, or book. That was how Monsieur de Kératry became acquainted with this out-at-elbows poet. He had written a delicious little *vaudeville*, full of smart things, but quite unactable—charming songs and duets, utterly unsingable. "I

should like to give you a chance," said the manager, "but your play wants licking into shape. You had better take it to a fellow I know, who was once a genius—wrote plays, poetry, criticism, political articles—and who now does piecework for anything he can get." Monsieur de Kératry took the hint, and carried his play to the poor man in the Quartier Latin, who took it all to pieces as if it had been a clock that wouldn't go, and put it all together again in admirable working order.'

'Wonderful!' cried Lady Constance. 'And so that is what a literary *teinturier* does. One is always hearing of new professions in Paris.'

'*Cela ne se peut pas*,' said the Vicomte.

He had been looking intensely bored, and even angry, while Amélie told her story, no doubt disgusted at his own personality being shouldered out of the conversation by this literary Bohemian of the Quartier Latin.

'But, my dear Vicomte, I tell you *that is*,' protested Amélie. 'I have been relating an absolute fact. For five napoleons this poor man remodelled our friend's play.'

'*Cela ne se peut pas*,' repeated the poet, doggedly, and with infinite disgust. 'A man of honour could never lend himself to such a transaction. What, stand before the public as the author of a work improved, remodelled, you say, by another hand? Impossible.'

He bristled, he reddened with indignation. Never had they seen him so excited, and by a subject which could have no personal interest for him. He was consumed with the righteous rage of the just man who cannot endure the mere thought of evil—of the man whose nice sense of honour cannot brook the smallest sophistication.

'I suppose a poet has loftier ideas about such things than a man who writes *vaudevilles*,' said Amélie, with her innocent air. 'Monsieur de Kératry seemed to think there was nothing wrong in the matter. He would not have told me if he had been ashamed of it.'

'There are men who are such intolerable egotists that they will talk of their own meannesses rather than not talk of themselves,' said the Vicomte, still indignant.

He had set down his tea-cup in a tumult of fine feeling, and was pacing the room in front of the long plate-glass windows—people in Paris were still in that uncultivated condition of mind in which large sheets of plate-glass, letting in the sky and the trees and flowers, and all the loveliness of the external world, were deemed admirable. They had not risen to that finer and more artistic sense of beauty which excludes the sky and the garden, and composes picturesque effects out of small window

panes, sumptuous draperies, and a perpetual twilight. The delight in darkness, dust and Alma Tadema interiors, had not begun. This may have been because the art of *maquillage* was a new thing, and there were still women of fashion who could face the light.

'After all, it can be no worse than collaboration,' argued Amélie, a young person not easily put down. 'I can see no difference.'

'Did your friend put this other person's name on the title-page of his *vaudeville?*' asked the Vicomte.

'I think not.'

'Of course not,' retorted the poet; 'that makes all the difference. He accepted another man's aid, not as a partner in his work, in his profit, in his fame. He palmed off the talent of another as his own—took credit for the thoughts of another man's brain. I tell you once again, Mademoiselle, among men of honour, *cela ne se peut pas.*'

The last words came with a serpent-like hiss from the thin lips of the *petit crevé.*

Amélie shrugged her shoulders.

'*Cet homme est assommant,*' she muttered, as she rose to accompany her mother, who was taking leave of Lady Constance.

Hortense lingered over her *adieux* to the poet, who was evidently out of humour.

'You will not forget this evening,' she said, pleadingly, looking at the sallow, pinched countenance with beseeching eyes.

Even love itself could not think the Vicomte handsome, but Hortense thought him intellectual, spiritual, patrician, almost divine; and she was not ashamed of her worship. Perhaps she had begun by flattering him wantonly and wilfully, in her quality of *demoiselle à marier*, and had come at last to be the dupe of her own flatteries. It would seem, in any case, that her present feeling for Paul de Pontchartrain was sincere to agony.

'What is there to remember for this evening in particular?' he asked, with a blank look.

Hortense smiled a pained smile, as of one who hides a wound.

'Mamma's Thursday,' she said. 'You will come, will you not? We shall have some very good music to-night.'

'I am getting to detest music,' he said, curtly; 'it is the same everywhere—Beethoven, Chopin, Schubert, *plein le dos.* And I have so many engagements. It seems to me that it is always Thursday.'

'You were not with us last week.'

'Was I not? One lives so fast in the season—and this year the pace has been increased from *presto* to *prestissimo*. But I will be with you this evening if you really wish it.'

'You know that I wish it,' she answered, looking him straight in the eyes.

The look was as plain a confession as the Vicomte de Pontchartrain, in his character of lady-killer, had ever received; but the day was past when such avowals had power to move him. He put on a little tender, consolatory smile, and murmured blandly—

'Count upon me, dear Mademoiselle.'

He pressed the little hand in its light pearl-gray glove, and so they parted.

While the Vicomte was being canvassed by Hortense, Madame Jarzé was applying her own powers of persuasion in another direction.

'I hope we shall see you this evening, Lady Constance,' she said.

'Ah, it is Thursday again!' exclaimed Constance. 'How short the weeks are in March! It seems only the other day that I spent such a delightful hour in your *salon*.'

'That other day is more than eight weeks ago,' said Amélie, reproachfully. 'It was just after the *jour de l'an*.'

'And to-night we shall have some particularly nice people,' continued Madame Jarzé. 'Among them there is some one I want so much to present to you. You have heard me talk of Monsieur Ishmael.'

Had Lady Constance been strictly sincere, she would have said that, for the last three months, she had heard Madame Jarzé talk of no one else.

'That is the millionaire, I think,' she said, with her quiet smile, a smile full of subtle meanings. 'Yes, I have heard you mention him. I have heard other people talk of him too.'

'A man has only to make a million sterling, and all the world will talk of him,' interjected the Vicomte, in his most acrid tone. 'There is no true sovereignty in this Paris of the second Empire except that of *sa Majesté l'argent*.'

'It is not on account of Monsieur Ishmael's money that *we* care for him,' said Amélie, tossing up her head. 'We are not that kind of people. It is for his noble mind, his great qualities, the good he has done, that we like him. And I am sure, Lady Constance, if you only knew as much of him as we do, you would admire him for the same reasons.'

'One hears so much of new people and of new things in Paris, that they are stale in a week,' said Constance, with a languid elevation of firmly-pencilled brows. 'There is such

incessant talk—every subject is worn threadbare, and one gets to hate people before one sees their faces. At least *I* do. But I have no doubt this millionaire person is perfect since you all think so much of him.'

'*I* do not think much of him, Lady Constance,' protested the Vicomte; 'pray leave me out of it. I think that he is a *parvenu* after the manner of all other *parvenus;* only he is just a little cleverer than most of them—lives plainly, dresses plainly, is not effusively generous—does not pose as patron of artists and men of letters—and contrives to make his wealth as little obnoxious as possible. But I've no doubt the heart of the man is bloated with pride.'

'He has not an iota of pride,' exclaimed Amélie, blushing prettily with indignation. 'I believe he forgets that he is rich. I once told him so, and he only laughed and said, "At any rate, Mademoiselle, I do not forget that I was once poor."'

'Very neat,' said the Vicomte; and then, in a tone of perfect innocence, he said, 'What an excellent adventure this Monsieur Ishmael would be for any enterprising *demoiselle à marier*. In the old times, when Louis Philippe was King, it used to be the parents who arranged marriages, I am told. The daughters came out of their convents, *jolies à croquer et bêtes à faire peur*, and were married by family contract. But now young ladies are free lances. They dress like the *demoiselles Benoîton*, have debts like a young man of family, and go into society with sword and bow, like the knights of old, to make their own conquests, their own captives.'

'Do you regret the old-fashioned customs, Vicomte?' asked Lady Constance, laughingly.

'Not in the least. Society is ever so much pleasanter since young ladies have been adventurous; and I believe the young ladies themselves do better by the new system'

Amélie turned her back upon him with an indignant rustle of her gray *glacé* flounces.

'I hope we have said enough to raise your curiosity, and that you *will* come this evening,' said Madame Jarzé, sweeping her voluminous *moiré* towards the door with a mighty rushing sound.

Lady Constance sighed.

'How glad I should be if I could feel curious about anything in this world!' she said. 'However, I will come to make the acquaintance of your Monsieur Ishmael. What a strange name! He is a Jew, I suppose. Paris is choked with rich Jews. The second Empire is the restoration of Israel.'

'Monsieur Ishmael a Jew! Not the least in the world,

exclaimed Madame Jarzé. 'He is a good Catholic, and on excellent terms with Father Deguerry, the *curé* of the Madeleine.'

'Then he has one of the noblest of men for his friend. *Au revoir!*' and, with curtseys and little friendly speeches, Lady Constance accompanied her departing guests, French fashion, to the hall, where a Diana by Pradier and a dancing faun by Lequesne showed white against a bank of rose-coloured and amber azalias.

'She is positively insufferable,' said Hortense, frowning vindictively, as the mother and her two daughters squeezed themselves into the victoria, which was hired two afternoons a week to take them for an airing in the Bois, and which borne a almost life-like resemblance to a private carriage.

Monsieur Jarzé's official income, albeit augmented by various tributes from complacent tradesmen—tributes which his enemies had been known to stigmatize as bribery and corruption—would not cover the expenses of a Parisian stable.

'I wonder, mamma, that you could be such an idiot as to invite that woman for this evening,' exclaimed Amélie, looking daggers at her parent.

'My dear child, if I did not get distinguished people occasionally at my Thursdays, my Thursdays would cease to exist. And I only established them for the advantage of my daughters.'

'And when one of your daughters has the chance of making a great match, you try to burke it by introducing a formidable rival on the scene,' retorted Amélie.

'There is no danger. Lady Constance is an Englishwoman—independent, rich, full of prejudices, as proud as Lucifer. She is not at all likely to marry a self-made man who was once a stonemason.'

'Who knows? One is never sure of anybody or anything.'

## CHAPTER XXVIII

### 'UNTIL THE DAY BREAK AND THE SHADOWS FLEE'

When Lady Constance Danetree declared her inability to be keenly interested or curious about anything in this life, she was not giving utterance to one of those little affectations with which men and women are apt to interlard their conversation, mere parrot speech, a vague echo caught from a super-refined age, which pretends to have outgrown the faculty of emotion. She spoke the sober truth. A life which, from her cradle, had given her almost everything she wanted left no margin for wishes or eager curiosity about anything. She had steeped herself in the sunlight of life; she had surrounded herself with the society she liked best; she had travelled and seen everything she cared to see in civilized Europe. For the vast world beyond, the wilderness and mountain, oceans and mighty rivers, she was content to trust books and photographs, letting her mind go out amidst that wonder-world in idle day-dreams, and letting other people do the actual work for her. She had stuffed herself with new books, new ideas. She knew four continental languages, and was not obliged to wait till new theories filtered into English literature. She could imbibe them at the fountain head.

Perfect independence, ample means, freedom from all family ties, had made her life different from the lives of other women. She lived faster than others, she never had to wait for her opportunity, to bide her time. She did not say, 'I will go to Rome in November if I can.' She could do whatever she liked, and had only to say to her major-domo, an accomplished Hanoverian, 'Steinmark, bear in mind that I am to be in Rome on the first of November.' Steinmark heard, remembered, and obeyed. He went three days in advance of his mistress, carrying a certain portion of her luggage. He met her at the railway station, and conducted her to the most perfect set of apartments in the city, where she found her books and her music, her photographs and her basket of crewels, all in their appropriate places in the *salon*. Her journey through life in these golden days of her widowhood was like a royal progress. Everybody adored her, some for self-interest, many for her own sake, simply because she was adorable.

In Paris her admirers were legion. A beautiful and accomplished Englishwoman, of high birth and ample means, who

ived in a charming house and received on a liberal scale, was sure to be popular. People schemed and intrigued to get a card for Lady Constance Danetree's evenings; and to be seen at one of her little dinners was a *cachet* of good style. Madame Jarzé had laboured, underground like the mole, for a year before she and her daughters were allowed to cross the threshold of that exquisite villa. It had cost her another six months of coaxing and diplomacy to get Lady Constance to a state dinner—a dinner which made a palpable encroachment upon Monsieur Jarzé's quarter's salary; and now, by dint of a pertinacity in polite attentions which touched the confines of impudence, Madame Jarzé and her daughters were able to proclaim themselves among the chosen few—three or four hundred or so—who were Lady Constance Danetree's intimate friends.

Having promised to go to Madame Jarzé's party, Lady Constance left one of the nicest houses in the Parc Monceaux, where she had been dining at an early hour, in order to keep her word. She was loyalty itself in small things as well as in large. She went from a choice and intellectual circle regretfully to be bored in a frivolous crowd; but a promise is sacred, and she knew that there was a high value set upon her presence in the Jarzé household.

The house in which the Jarzés occupied a second floor was a new one, fearfully and wonderfully new; a large and magnificent mansion of which the *rez-de-chaussée* was let to a marquis, the *entre-sol* to an actress, the *premier* to a rich Jew, and the second floor to Monsieur Jarzé at about half the rent of a house in May Fair. Above this story the inhabitants retrograded in social position, just as the ceilings diminished in height, and the plaster cornices and doorheads decreased in florid ornamentation till the edifice was crowned by the domesticities of a couple of clerks and their families, and a printer's foreman.

The Jarzé *salon* had an air of chilly elegance, which struck cold to the heart of a stranger newly admitted to its hospitality. The decoration was white and gold, the Louis-Quatorze furniture crimson and gold. A few Sèvres cups and saucers, a sprinkling of *bibelots*, bonbon-boxes, perfume caskets, photograph albums were scattered on the gilded tables, and strove to give a home-like air to this abode of plaster of Paris picked out with gold. The crimson-satin curtains were scanty, the chairs were too few, the sofas were hard, the rooms were draughty. A magnificent grand piano was the chief feature of the small inner *salon*. 'A gift from the Empress to my daughters,' said Madame Jarzé to any new acquaintance, pointing to the instrument with her fan. 'A bribe from the maker, who wanted his name introduced at Court,' murmured the initiated.

To-night, when the man of all work, with an air that would have done credit to a groom of the chambers, announced Lady Constance Danetree, the rooms were fairly full. People were standing because there were no more chairs on which to sit, a state of things which pleased Madame Jarzé, as it gave the impression of a crowd.

A distinguished violin player was just concluding a scena from Weber's 'Euryanthe.' Lady Constance gave her hand to her hostess without a word.

'You are late, but I knew you would not disappoint us,' cooed Madame Jarzé, with the accents of a sucking dove; and then, in a still lower voice, she murmured, 'He is here.'

'He? Who?'

She had really forgotten. At the dinner, in a great painter's house, the talk had been of the loftiest, and Constance Danetree's mind had wandered far from the regions of millionaire speculation in bricks and mortar. She had just been reading Schleiermacher's 'Plato,' and they had talked of Greek philosophy and the Greek world.

'Who? Why Monsieur Ishmael. He is in the little *salon* listening to Sinori.'

Constance Danetree turned and looked at the inner *salon* as at a picture, or a scene on the stage. It was divided by a curtained archway from the larger reception room, and just now the curtain was drawn back, and the pillared arch made a frame for the picture within.

There were only three people in the *salon*. Monsieur Sinori, the violinist, a man of middle-age and fine presence, a handsome Italian head, standing by the piano in the light of the candles, with his chin upon his violin, looking down at the varnished wood as a man looks at a sentient thing which he loves with soul and senses alike; Amélie Jarzé, seated in front of the piano, and looking up at a tall dark man who stood on the other side of the instrument, watching the face of the player, and listening with all his might. This tall dark man was Ishmael—contractor, engineer, speculator, philanthropist, millionaire, and one of the most famous men in Paris.

This is what seventeen years of hard work had done for Raymond Caradec's son.

What other changes had those years brought about—what change in the man himself?

Some change assuredly. Those years, and the responsibilities that had gone along with them, had added dignity to the firm, bold brow, with its conquering ridge, and its strongly-marked eyebrows above eagle eyes. The carriage of the head was loftier than of old. He had carried his head higher, with the air

of a man who, for good reason, scorns his fellows ever since his wife abandoned and his friend betrayed him. Such treatment hardens a man, throws him back upon his inner self, develops his sense of his own value. He has been treated like dirt; and he resolves to let the world see that he is not dirt. From the hour of his wife's elopement fortune followed every act of Ishmael's career. He bore a charm, as it seemed. His small patrimonial fortune, invested in his own manner, had multiplied a hundredfold. 'The luckiest man in Paris,' men told each other; and they took their schemes and their money to him, and deemed fortune certain could they but secure his co-operation.

For years he had been a master spirit among men in his own particular line. This sense of mastery—of being always first—had given some touch of kingliness to his aspect, his tone, his manner—something of that look and manner which is seen in famous warriors, in the men who have lived through such nights and days as that of Waterloo, or the battle of the Sutlej, men who have fought like Clive, or marched like Roberts. Peace has its victories as well as war—its trials—its defeats.

Ishmael had stood on the bank of the Seine in the gray of a winter dawn to see a mighty railway bridge, the work of a year, snapped asunder, crumbled to ruin—work fresh from the builder's hand as a sovereign from the mint—a catastrophe meaning the loss of nine or ten million francs to the contractor.

'Well, my friends,' he said, with a long-drawn sigh, and his hands deep in his pockets; 'we must begin it all again.'

And next day came the counter-balance, some stroke of luck which paid for the bridge.

A man with such a history seems as much out of place at a tea-party in the Champs Elysées as a lion in an aviary; but Ishmael bore himself easily enough as he leant across the piano and watched the face of the violin player.

'Delicious,' he said, drawing a long breath when the last pianissimo chord died into silence. 'How you must enjoy playing like that, Monsieur Sinori.'

Sinori smiled upon him, pleased at the *naïve* compliment.

'Weber and my Stradivarius understand each other,' he answered, quietly, putting the violin into its case.

Amelie's hands began to wander over the keys, and finally settled into 'Dites lui,' played with melting tenderness, while eyes of bewitching blue glanced shyly upward at the millionaire from the covert of fluffy golden hair.

But the pretty glance, the languishing melody, were thrown away upon Ishmael. Perhaps he had had just a little too much of innocent childish beauty in his youth. The highly-trained

daughter of the second Empire could never seem as childlike or as free from guile as Pâquerette had seemed in those days of the Rue Sombreuil ; or, if she could, her infantine graces would have served only to recall the one great horror of Ishmael's life.

'How well Schneider sings that song,' he said, coolly, as he turned from the piano.

'I want to present you to Lady Constance Danetree,' said Madame Jarzé, approaching him at this moment.

There was a clear space, diameter of a yard or so, in the middle of the *salon ;* and here the two great people met, while society, represented chiefly by elegant nobodies, looked on and admired.

They met as royalties meet, a king and queen among men and women, each taller by half a head than the majority of the men and women around them—each with an air of nobility which dominated the crowd. Constance's perfect figure and grand style of beauty were set off by the rich simplicity of her toilet—a gown of dark brown velvet innocent of a vestige of trimming save the narrow Valenciennes tucker gathered tightly round the marble shoulders by a slim thread of gold. A collet necklace of matchless Brazilian diamonds encircled the round full throat, and this was the only jewel which relieved the sombre richness of the lady's costume.

'*Comme elle est fagotée !* How odd that no Englishwoman knows how to dress !' murmured Hortense, behind her fan, to the author of 'Mes Râles,' who was sitting by her side in the embrasure of a window.

'I think you should exclude Lady Constance Danetree from that sweeping condemnation,' said the Vicomte, languidly. 'That brown velvet is full of voluptuous lights and shadows, and with such arms and shoulders a woman should never wear anything but darkest velvet. For the fragile and the attenuated '—with a glance at Hortense's thin arms enveloped in clouds of tulle, 'a more airy style is admirable ; but statuesque beauty requires solid treatment.'

'I hate solidity,' retorted Hortense. 'To my mind grace consists in curves and undulating movements.'

The Vicomte smiled blandly.

'You, who are the very spirit of grace, have a right to be critical.'

He rewarded his slave with a civil little speech now and then—though his general tone was as impassive as that of a braminical cow—just as a man throws an occasional biscuit to a dog that persistently fawns upon him.

The millionaire and the Englishwoman talked to each other a little about nothing particular, as newly-introduced people

talk, with only the faintest interest, neither knowing of what manner of conversation the other is capable. Nothing in Constance Danetree's manner betrayed that her mind had undergone a shock of any kind within the last five minutes. Not the faintest elevation of her eyebrows indicated surprise. Yet she had been as much astonished since her entrance into that room as ever she had been in her life.

Ishmael was in every way the opposite of the man she expected to see. She was a woman full of prejudices, and there was a class of people for which she had a special detestation. She hated self-educated men, and she hated self-made millionaires. The former she had always found intolerable in their assumption of intellectual superiority to all the rest of the world, the latter odious in their pride of wealth. She had been bored by people's praise of Ishmael, the great contractor—the man to whom the Parisian workman owed his new boulevards, his palatial barracks, planned with a novel regard for sanitation; the man to whom the very fourfooted beasts were debtors for the boon of being slaughtered under comfortable conditions; the man whose acumen had been a great factor in the improvement of hospital architecture all over France; and the man who was reported to have done more philanthropic work on his own account and in his own quiet way than any other man who had won fortune under the second Empire.

Lady Constance heard all, believed all—too indifferent, indeed, for disbelief—and made her own mind-picture of the great contractor.

A short, thick-set man, of course—contractors were always built squat, she believed—a man with shaggy, light-coloured eyebrows, cunning gray eyes, a large sensual mouth, and a heavy jowl; a purse-proud man, undoubtedly, given to bragging of the great things he had done for himself and the world; an ignorant man, knowing hardly anything outside his own uninteresting business; a *bon vivant*, no doubt, giving himself the airs of a *gourmet* on the strength of newly-acquired wealth, finding fault with the *bisque* at other people's dinners, and protesting that there were only three men in Paris who could cook a *suprême de volaille*—a man, moreover, with the stamp of his origin upon him in the shape of the carpenter's thumb.

And behold, instead of the short squat person, with bristling pepper-and-salt eyebrows, she saw standing before her a man of six feet two, with darkest brows and flashing eyes, the features of a Roman warrior—a man who looked well under forty years of age.

She measured him from head to foot as he talked to her, with a calm and cold survey; yet her heart beat just a thought

faster on account of her surprise. For the first time in her life, she felt that she had been a prejudiced, self-opinionated fool. If a contractor could be such a person as this, why object to contractors?

'Women are fools,' she thought, shifting the blame from herself to the sex in general. 'We are always jumping at conclusions, always mistaking our own fancies for absolute facts.'

She stole a glance at his right hand. Yes, there was the mark of the beast. The thumb was too square and solid to belong to a gentleman's hand. And then she looked at Pontchartrain, whose white effeminate fingers dangled across the elbow of his crimson satin chair, and from the hand looked at the small bald head, the slim, narrow figure.

'What a rat the creature looks beside this master builder!' she thought; 'and yet I have no doubt he looks down upon the man who once handled the mason's hammer.'

She tried to imagine the man to whom she was talking, clad in a blouse, hewing stone, labouring among other labourers; but picture him however she pleased, she could only see him as a king among men. Nobody had told her that there was good blood in his veins. That tradition of a noble origin died out among Ishmael's fellow-workmen by the time he had been three years in Paris. The Parisian world knew him only as the architect of his own fortunes.

The dining-room doors were flung open presently, and Madame Jarzé's guests strolled in to refresh themselves at a buffet where a *thé à l'Anglaise*, with sandwiches, *petits fours*, inoffensive syrups, and a little Bordeaux were arranged with an elegance which gave an air of luxury at a very small outlay. Ishmael stood beside Lady Constance while she sipped a cup of inoffensive tea. Amélie floated about the room, offering a casket of *pralines* and *marrons glacés* to her mother's guests, while Hortense plied her poet with red-currant syrup and sweet cakes, imploring him to make people happy before they departed by the recitation of one of his '*Rôles*.'

'They are not intended to be declaimed in a *salon*,' objected Pontchartrain, who liked nothing better than to inflict his verses upon society. 'People come here in the right mood to hear the scraping of catgut, but not to listen to the cry of a human heart.'

'Indeed, you are mistaken. Monsieur Sinori's playing has just put people in tune for true poetry—that exquisite melody of Weber's, so weird, so strange.'

Pontchartrain gave her a withering look.

'I am sorry you have not yet discovered the difference between a fiddler and a poet,' he said, while the kind, dark face of the Italian, who was sipping a *sorbet* on the other side of the

table, smiled at them across the cups and saucers, unconscious of the Vicomte's depreciation.

'If you would only give us that too pathetic little poem, "*La prière d'un fagot.*" Let me see, now : how does it begin ? "*Ecrasez moi, O Dieu.*"'

'You like those lines,' said the Vicomte, relenting from his severity, and turning his tarnished eyeballs upon the damsel with a gratified look. 'Yes ; I think that prayer of the galley-slave is worth a hecatomb of your *fade* love songs, your pious ineptitudes, your *patatras* of angels and children, and grandmammas and grandpapas.'

And then, between his clenched teeth, frowning darkly the while, he mumbled his own verses—

'O, toi ! qui, dans mon cœur, n'excitas que démence,
Que me sert ta pitié, que me fait ta clémence,
Frappe sans plus tarder celui qui te maudit,
Ecrase et foudroie.'

'You will recite those grand lines for us, will you not ?' pleaded Hortense.

The Vicomte shrugged his shoulders and elevated his eyebrows with the air of a man who yields to the inexorable frivolity of his surroundings.

'If my recitation can possibly interest any one,' he muttered, with a supercilious glance at the company.

'It will delight us all. Monsieur le Vicomte is going to recite something when we go back to the *salon*,' announced Hortense, triumphantly.

People gave the usual murmur of suppressed rapture, and the pleasures of the table being by this time fairly exhausted, the majority returned to the *salon*, leaving a privileged minority to take their ease, and light their cigarettes with Monsieur Jarzé, a stout, inoffensive person, who had never had a will of his own since his marriage. The dining-room doors being closed upon these sybarites, Monsieur Pontchartrian took his stand in the centre of the *salon* beside a gilded *guéridon*, upon which the thoughtful Hortense had placed a glass of water.

He scraped his throat once or twice, plunged his right hand in his waistcoat, played with his watch chain with the left, looked first downwards at his neat little varnished boots, then upwards at the ceiling, and then, in a deep and altogether artificial voice —his natural tones inclining to a nasal treble—he began the prayer of the galley-slave, the *forçat* of Toulon, broiling and toiling under a copper sky, scorned and hated of men, forgotten of God.

Needless to say that the 'fagot's' prayer was one long blasphemy, that he reviled his Creator in every line, that the whole poem reeked with the foulest atheism, and was in perfect harmony with the new French school—a curious mixture of slang and sublimity, pathos and bathos, Victor Hugo and Villon, Rabelais, and Voltaire. The Vicomte, with his eyes on the ceiling and his organ tones sinking ever and anon into an inaudible groan, declaimed his verses with an intense solemnity, a profound belief in their power to inspire awe and horror; and when, at last, his voice melted by a gradual diminuendo into silence, he looked round the room with the air of giving his audience permission to breathe again. There were more murmurs, which might mean anything in the world, and which did, for the most part, mean sincere gratification at the thing being over.

'Is that your idea of poetry, Madame?' asked Ishmael, still standing beside Lady Constance Danetree.

'I freely confess that it is not,' answered Constance; 'but there is a fashion in literature, just as there is in gowns and bonnets, and these horrors are the novelty of the day. It is the school of Baudelaire and his Flowers of Evil.'

'And such men as these hope to fill the place of Alfred de Musset,' said Ishmael.

'You admire Musset?' she asked, wondering that there should be room for the love of poetry in the mind of a master of figures and mechanics.

'Yes. He is not a cheerful poet, but he has given me at least distraction of mind in many a gloomy hour.'

'And in your life—which I imagine must have been full of business anxieties—you could really find time for poetry?'

'Why not? The man who works hardest at facts and figures has most need of an occasional excursion into the unreal world. There is always the longing for an oasis in the desert of dull realities.'

It was growing late, and Madame Jarzé's guests were dispersing. Lady Constance had intended only to spend half an hour in the Jarzé *salon*—to keep her word to her hostess, and no more. She had stayed nearly two hours, and the time had seemed to her as nothing. Ishmael accompanied her down the broad stone staircase with its sumptuous carpet and gilded banisters, its architectural doors, surmounted by plaster of Paris cupidons and festoons of flowers moulded by machinery, after the school of Jean Goujon. The actress's door on the *entresol* was ajar, and there came from within a ripple of laughter, a murmur of well-bred masculine voices, and a cheerful chinking of glass and silver as Lady Constance and her companion passed. The actress was altogether *comme-il-faut*, or she

would not have been allowed to inhabit that temple of the respectabilities; but even the most correct of actresses must have supper after the play, and cannot always sup alone, nor is a little game of baccarat, played quietly within closed doors, an offence against society.

Ishmael saw Lady Constance to her carriage.

'I have very little way to go,' she said, as she bade him good-night; 'only just on the other side of the arch.'

During their leisurely descent of the staircase she had been wondering a little that he did not seize the opportunity to ask permission to call upon her. She was generally beset by people who craved that privilege after the briefest acquaintance, people whose requests she granted with the feelings of a martyr; but here was a man in whom she felt really interested, an exceptional man, as Madame Jarzé had said, and he held his peace.

Perhaps she made that little remark about the locality of her abode in order to give him an opportunity. But he took no advantage of her kindness.

'Do you live in this part of Paris?' she asked.

'No, I have an old house in the Place Royale.'

'How curious! Do you really care for old houses—you who have built so many new ones?'

'Perhaps it is for that reason I love the old. One gets weary of the sameness of modern Parisian houses—white, and cold, and dazzling—too small for a palace, too big for a home My old panelled rooms in the Place Royale have a homely look that I like.'

'But are they not too large for a bachelor?'

'Not too large for my books.'

'You have a library, then?' asked Constance, unconsciously supercilious.

She could not help feeling surprised at any evidence of refinement in a man who had begun his career as a journeyman stonemason.

'I have been collecting books for the last eighteen years—they are my chief companions—they mark the stages of my life, are a calendar of the years that are gone. You could never imagine how full of eloquence even the backs of them are for their owner.'

'How interesting to collect in that way—slowly—from year to year—instead of ordering a library *en bloc!*' said Constance.

Had she set herself to imagine a millionaire-contractor's library, she would have pictured a lofty and spacious room, with carved bookcases and classic busts to order, and a gorgeous array of Purgold or Bozerian bindings, contents selected by the book-

seller. And it seemed that this man valued books for their own sake, and had chosen them for himself, one by one. Truly a strange man after his kind.

'Good-night.'

'Good-night.'

They shook hands through the carriage window, almost like old friends, and the brougham drove off towards the archway, white and pure in the March moonbeams, sculptured with victories that were past and gone, telling of a time more heroic even than those golden years of the second Empire. And they, too, were gone with the snows of last winter, and France drooped her Imperial head ever so little, bowed with a growing sense of impotence. Had she not pledged herself to establish an Empire *là bas* between the two Americas, and had she not failed ignominiously? Had she not been warned off the premises by the United States, bidden to depart with her army and its baggage, lest a worse thing should befall her? And she had been fooled by William and Bismarck, and she was ill-friends with Italy. Truly the glory of Israel had departed — and Ichabod was the word written, in mystic characters that only the wise could read, on yonder triumphal gate.

Lady Constance leant back in her brougham with a sigh, not for the vanishing splendours of the Empire, but with the faint, vague sense of disappointment. She had seen this millionaire about whom everybody had been plaguing her for the last six months, and she had been told again and again by Madame Jarzé that he had long desired to meet her. And they had met, and they had parted, without a word of any future meeting on his part. Could it be that, for once in her life, Lady Constance had failed to make a favourable impression upon a stranger of the opposite sex? Never before had such a thing happened to her. It would be, if this were so, an utterly new experience: new and, in some wise, unpleasant. Women accustomed to universal worship miss the incense albeit they may affect to despise the votive herd. And here was a man unlike the herd, and therefore interesting; and he had seen her, and evidently cared not a jot if he never saw her again.

And yet, on their first introduction, when their eyes met and their glances seemed to mingle in sudden light and warmth—mingle as two gases meet and take fire—then it had seemed to her as if, for both of them, that first meeting was an electric shock, a surprise, a revelation, a recognition almost. As if they two had from the very beginning of things been doomed so to meet, so to kindle into flame.

'What, is it *you*?' his eyes had seemed to say.

And he let her go without so much as the commonplace request for permission to call upon her.

Was he shy—*gauche*—at a loss how to act, from sheer ignorance of the conventionalities of daily life? She thought not. His manners were self-possessed and easy. He was grave, but not reserved. He spoke of himself freely, seemed in no wise disturbed by the sense of her superior rank. He had not made any attempt to continue the acquaintance simply because he was in no hurry to see her again. Of course, if he pleased, he could get Madame Jarzé to take him to the villa in the Bois; but that would seem a circuitous way of approaching a lady who had shown herself sufficiently gracious to be approached more directly.

'I daresay he is wrapped up in his bridges and viaducts, and detests women's society,' Constance told herself, as she drew her furred mantle closer round her before alighting at her own door.

It was a matter upon which a person of Constance Danetree's calm temperament might have been supposed incapable of wasting five minutes' thought; and yet, when her maid had been dismissed, she sat before the fire in her dressing-room staring at the smouldering logs, and brooding upon this frivolous question half through the night. She knew that it would be useless to lie down. Sleep was impossible for a brain on fire. She sat ill; the dark restful night-hours were well-nigh spent; sat with her slippered feet on the fender, her Indian silk dressing-gown wrapped carelessly round her, her hair coiled in a loose knot at the back of her head, pale, grave, like a sibyl reading the book of fate as written in flickering flame and falling embers. What was it, what did it mean, this sudden fever, never felt before—this persistency of the mind in dwelling upon one subject, this monotony of the fancy which would picture only one face—that dark Roman face, with the lambent flame in the eyes those grave lips, shaded but not hidden by the thick black moustache? What was it, this sudden possession taken of her soul—by a man whose face she had not seen six hours ago? Six hours ago, and she would have passed him in the street, unrecognised, unnoticed. And now, because they two had met and looked into each other's eyes, and talked to each other for a little while upon the most indifferent subjects, she could not banish him out of her mind for a moment. His image possessed her, mastered her fancy, filled her thoughts. He was there, at her side, as she sat by the fire. His presence was almost as real in the strength of her ardent fancy as if he had been there in the flesh. She wondered where, how soon, they would meet again. Her imagination began to picture possible meetings; her fancy

painted the scene of their *rencontre*, lighted it with the dazzle of sunshine, or the soft radiance of moonbeams—spoke for him, spoke for her—eloquent, spiritual, touching the confines of passion, breathing of unavowed love. And all this for a man she had met for the first time only six hours ago!

What did it all mean? Could it be the thing she had read of in novels, and smiled at for its foolishness, its impossibility? Could it be love at first sight—love given unsought, unasked, for a man who had once worked as a common stonemason? Bah! the idea was revolting.

A moment of scorn, a movement of indignation at her own folly, a sudden drawing up of the proud head. 'I will think of the man no more.'

And then, in the next instant, the statuesque throat drooped again, the rounded chin sank on the womanly breast, and the eyes gazed dreamily into the dying fire.

'I have wondered ever since I was a girl if I should ever know what love meant,' she thought. 'Has it come at last?'

A pause, and then a sudden light in the lovely eyes.

'Yes, it has come—it is here—and, for good or evil, I bid the stranger welcome.'

## CHAPTER XXIX

### 'MY BELOVED IS MINE, AND I AM HIS'

THE great circular show in the Champs de Mars was officially opened on the appointed first of April, but that wonderful fairy palace about which people had been talking all the winter first revealed itself to society amidst a chaotic confusion of planks, canvas, scaffolding, and workpeople of all kinds. Those Moorish palaces, Chinese pavilions, restaurants, cafés, drinking bars of the outermost circle—which were afterwards to become more famous, more popular, than all the wonders of art and science in the main building—existed at this period only in the imagination of official journalists, who went into raptures about splendours which were as yet only to be seen on paper. In a biting east wind, and amidst the clinking of hammers, the hurrying to and fro of workmen, the Imperial trio—Emperor, Empress, and fair young Prince—appeared, and the Exhibition was declared open. But there was no Imperial speech. The Luxembourg question made a little cloud in the political horizon at this period, while there was a thick darkness yonder over the volcanic soil of Mexico. Not a happy time for Imperial eloquence by any means; so the world's show was opened in discreet silence save for that clinking of hammers.

Lady Constance Danetree, having very few interests in life, was naturally among the first to visit the newly-opened building. She was not enthusiastic about exhibitions, having seen several, and declaring that she had been bored to death by the great Exhibition of Sixty-two, which had seemed to her a terrible falling off from the Crystal Palace of her childhood, the fairy scene in Hyde Park — flags flying, trees growing, fountains springing—all under the glittering glass roof. Yes, she had been a child then, full of capacity for delight; and in Sixty-two she was a young woman, leaning on her newly-wedded husband's arm. And now, in Sixty-seven, she declared that she was getting old, and cared not a straw for all the wonderful things that could be brought from the four corners of the earth.

But in Paris Lady Constance found she must do a good many things to please other people, or else take a great deal of trouble in saying no. It was sometimes less trouble to consent than to refuse. The Jarzés, who insisted upon being her intimate friends, self-elected to that office, plagued her to go to the Exhibition with

them on the first day, and, rather than be disobliging, she agreed to go.

There was a vague hope—a faint suggestion of her fancy—which made the idea of that early visit pleasanter than it would otherwise have been. Was it not likely that he—Ishmael—a man keenly interested in all practical things, would be among the earliest visitors? If he were there, the place was so gigantic, that the odds against meeting him would be tremendous. But he *might* be there, and they *might* meet; and even this gave zest to the business, and put Constance in good humour. She asked the Jarzés to breakfast on the first of April, and was in excellent spirits during the meal—served with an ideal elegance, prepared by an ideal cook—a natural result of ample means and ample leisure for making the best use of money.

'I wonder whether your friend, Monsieur Ishmael, will be at the Exhibition to-day?' she said, carelessly, as they drove from the door.

The east wind was blowing, the sky was dull and gray, but the mere thought that they two might meet steeped the world in warmth and sunlight.

Amélie looked at her intently for an instant with a much keener gaze than one would expect from a *petite frimousse chiffonnée* under a cloud of pale gold hair.

'Monsieur Ishmael is just the last person I expect to meet in the Exhibition,' she said, 'for I think his interest in the place must be exhausted by this time. He is a privileged person, and has been allowed to explore the works as often as he liked. Indeed, I believe he was consulted about the plan of the building, and has watched the growth of it from the very first.'

Madame Jarzé smiled approvingly at her younger daughter.

'Monsieur Ishmael and my Amélie are fast friends,' she said. It is strange what an interest the dear child takes in great engineering works. I found her the other day puzzling her poor little brain over a tremendous book on canals.'

'There are times when one sickens of a life made up of *chiffons*,' said Amélie, with a sentimental air.

'When is that, I wonder?' asked Hortense, contemptuously. When your dressmaker refuses to trust you for any more gowns, or when you have been short of partners at a ball?'

'Amélie never has any lack of partners,' said the mother, indignantly.

Madame Jarzé and her elder hope lived in a kind of armed neutrality. The day had been when Hortense was paraded everywhere, dressed, praised, petted as a daughter whose early and brilliant marriage must inevitably do honour to the house of Jarzé; but when chance after chance was lost, and Hortense began to grow

thin and hollow-cheeked, the mother lost faith in this first venture, and concentrated all her hopes upon the second. True, that Hortense was handsome: years ago she had ranked as the beauty-daughter, and Amélie had been left to pine in the background. Hortense had large dark eyes, a classic profile, while Amélie's *retroussé* nose and large mouth, light gray eyes, and plump figure were *bourgeoise* to the last degree. But as time went on Hortense's complexion grew sallow, the classic profile sharpened to severity, the thin lips became almost pallid, the dark eyes assumed a gloomy look, while, on the other hand, *ces dames* had brought *retroussé* noses, large mouths, and plump figures into fashion—the little *minois chiffonné*, the King Charles' spaniel style of face, set off by a cloud of fluffy yellow hair, became the rage—and Amélie was admired; while Hortense, with her air of Madame Roland about to ascend the scaffold, was left to wither in the cold shade of absolute neglect. Amélie had made an exhaustive study of the airs and graces of *ces dames*, whom she saw daily in the Bois, and nightly at opera or theatre; and upon this popular style she had founded and fashioned her own beauty. The neutral-tinted hair became a golden yellow; the pencilled eyebrows gave piquancy by their dark, firm line; the large full lips were accentuated with carmine, and the plump figure was laced and moulded into the fashionable form. In a word, Amélie was as like Cora as it was possible for her to be under existing conditions. The Court official, elderly and half-blind, stared at the dazzling apparition and wondered—nay, even went so far on one occasion as to ask his wife if Amélie's style of dress was quite respectable; but at the very next ball at the Tuileries the Empress herself graciously informed him that Mademoiselle Amélie was much more attractive than her elder sister—suspected of an Orleanist bias—and that his younger daughter was *chic*, all that there is of the most *chic*.

'Oh,' thought Monsieur Jarzé, 'then that is *chic?* I am glad I know what *chic* means.'

Lady Constance leant back in her carriage with a weary air. All her interest in the Exhibition had vanished in a breath. The whole thing became a nuisance. These Jarzés, with their unpleasant idiosyncrasies, their half-concealed antagonisms: why had she ever permitted herself to associate with such people? That younger girl had obviously dyed her hair and painted her eyebrows: a creature of hardly twenty years of age. Hortense was as obviously malignant. They were like a pair of wicked sisters in a fairy tale. And to know such people, and to go about with them, only for lack of the moral courage to shut one's door in their faces! But society is made so.

This was the drift of Lady Constance Dunetree's thoughts

as her carriage crossed the river and drew up at the entrance to the Exhibition amidst a confusion of dependencies and outbuildings in the course of erection, waggons disgorging their contents, packing-cases, diggers and delvers laying out the ground-plans of future gardens, labourers groaning as they carried the tanks for the future aquarium.

Within all was in an embryo state, like a first rehearsal of a pantomime. Lady Constance and her friends went about looking with a cursory air at everything, hardly seeing anything. The whole business had all at once become flat, stale, and unprofitable to a woman spoiled by unbroken prosperity and in search of strong emotions.

Three weeks ago a strong emotion had come upon her unawares like a galvanic shock and she had been living on the memory of that feeling ever since. She despised herself for this strange weakness of a strong nature, never having realised the fact that the strongest natures are most prone to such aberrations. That she, Constance Danetree, the courted and admired, could allow her fancy to be touched, her deepest feelings awakened by a stranger, a man of whom she knew nothing definite except the one galling fact that he had begun his career as a common labourer. To such a man, unsought, she had surrendered her thoughts, her dreams, her peace of mind—she, the daughter of one of the proudest peers in Ireland. What was it—magic—madness—or only the folly that comes of a life given over to frivolous amusements—a life without high aim, or unselfish purpose? She told herself that this humiliation, this bitter sense of being mastered by a foolish fancy, was the natural outcome of the life she had led since her husband's death—a life of self-indulgence, days and nights consumed in fashionable dissipation, a going to and fro over the earth, allowing her beauty to be praised by idle lips, accepting the flatteries of the insincere, living the hollow, artificial life of an advanced civilisation, a world tending towards its fall.

Philosophise as she might, the fact remained. For the coming of this man whom she had seen but once in her life she longed as ardently as Juliet longed for the advent of Romeo.

'And I have always despised Juliet,' thought Constance. 'Neither her youth nor her Italian temperament could excuse her in my eyes. And yet, ten years Juliet's senior, I am as romantic and impressionable as she.'

Three weeks ago she had found some excuse for her folly in the thought that the awakening of feeling had been as mutual as it was sudden. Instinct had told her that Ishmael's heart had answered beat for beat to the strong pulses of her own. They had spoken together only as strangers speak, but there

are looks and tones untranslatable in words, and yet fraught with deepest meanings to the keen apprehension of a sensitive woman. Had her instinct and her apprehension utterly deceived her on this one occasion of her life? Hitherto she had been so quick to perceive, that she had the reputation of a kind of clairvoyance; and now, in this crisis of her life, when unknown depths of feeling were mysteriously troubled, as the sacred pool by the angel, her powers of clairvoyance all at once deserted her, and she was as much at sea as a schoolgirl.

Nearly three weeks had passed since that March night when they two had met, and Ishmael had made no sign. It would have been so easy for him to contrive a second meeting. A man in his position, courted, worshipped almost for the sake of that wealth which everywhere means power—such a man was master of the situation. He had but to hint a wish, and his desire would be realised. A million of money is the modern realisation of Aladdin's lamp, which may have been an allegory intended to foreshadow the advent of silver kings, pill-makers, and great contractors.

Ishmael had not brought about a second *rencontre;* therefore, he had no desire to see Lady Constance Danetree again. This was what the lady had in her mind as she strolled listlessly in the outer circle, where the machinery was exhibited, and stifled a yawn as she listened to Madame Jarzé's complaint that the building offered no *coup d'œil.*

'Stupendous—immense—but no *coup d'œil.*'

And in the next moment a grave baritone voice was asking her what she thought of the exhibition, and her gloved hand was in the grasp of that strong hand with the mark of the beast, the carpenter's thumb. The whole scene was transformed in an instant, like a change in a stage decoration, and this outer circle of steam-engines, pistons, pulleys, model ships, model locomotives, ice-making, iron-cutting, potato-peeling machinery, which she had just denounced as hideous and revolting, became all at once full of interest.

'Will you show us some of the model bridges, and explain them to us?' asked Amélie, with the air of an intelligent child of nine or ten. 'I have been reading about canals and bridges lately.'

Ishmael smiled upon her benignantly, just as he might have smiled at the intelligent child.

'What, Mademoiselle; do you ever read?' he exclaimed. 'I thought you only cared for theatres, balls, races, pleasure of all kinds.'

'There comes a time when one grows weary of pleasure' said Amélie.

'Ah, but *you* have not come to that time. However, I shall be charmed to be your cicerone among the models. They are a little in my line. Did you see the iron-plated men-of-war as you came in? There are some very good models of suspension bridges a little way on—but everything is chaotic at present.'

He led the way, pointing out things as they passed—American 'Monitors,' turret ships, rams, floating batteries, transports with accommodation for four or five hundred horses. He stopped now and again to explain some curious piece of machinery, a monster locomotive, for instance, with ten wheels and a horizontal chimney. The rods, and cranks, and wheels which had seemed a meaningless monotony of steel and iron a few minutes before became at his voice instinct with meaning, and almost as full of individuality as if they had been living creatures. He told them about the Nasmyth hammer, which Lady Constance had hitherto supposed to be some handy little patent for knocking in tintacks without hurting one's fingers. He showed them cannon of different orders, and told them the secrets of those dark bores which, on the field of battle, were as the mouths of devils, vomiting death and destruction.

Constance listened silently, drinking in every tone of the deep musical voice. Strange that the tone should be so completely that of gentle blood and good breeding! Had the millionaire learned to speak as Monsieur Jourdain learned to fence—after he had made his fortune? She had believed hitherto that there was no more certain indication of man's origin than the sound of his voice; and yet here was a lowly-born mechanic with accents as pure and true as one could hear from a Condé or a Grammont. It was pleasant to listen even to the dry-as-dust details of a suspension bridge from such a fine organ. Constance stood by and listened with delight while Ishmael explained the plan of the bridge at Fribourg, in Switzerland, and of the tubular bridge over the Menai Straits, across which she had so often been carried, indolently lolling in the corner of a railway carriage, without a thought as to how the thing was done.

Somehow or other—Lady Constance could not have told how it came about—she found herself and Ishmael a little in advance of the rest after they had all seen the bridges. He had taken the opportunity of an encounter between Madame Jarzé and some friends to leave that lady and her two daughters a little in the rear while he led Constance onward through the wonder-world of mechanism. Amélie came hurrying after them presently—gushing—infantine—like the last *ingénue* in the last comedy at the Gymnase—'wanting to know, you know,' saying silly things of malice aforethought, with the idea that to

be silly is the surest way to fascinate a serious and practical man. Ishmael shook himself free from her as if she had been a burr. He addressed his conversation exclusively to Lady Constance, whereupon Amélie was constrained to console herself with the society of two feeble specimens of gilded youth who had been wandering all over the building in search of a *buvette* where they could get some *absinthe*, and were in despair at having discovered no such oasis in the desert of art and science.

'The papers said there was to be everything in the Exhibition, and there is absolutely nothing,' complained one of these *petits crevés*, small, pale, inclining to baldness, and with an air of latent phthisis after the manner of the species.

'And where, in the name of Heaven, is Spiers and Pond's?' cried the other. 'We were told to expect a perfect paradise from Spiers and Pond's.'

'It seems they are not arrived yet,' said Madame Jarzé. 'Hardly anything is completed—the kiosks, the model houses, the mosque, the aquarium, all the things we have heard so much about—not arrived. The Exhibition will not be worth looking at till June.'

With Ishmael for her guide, Lady Constance Danetree made an exhaustive round of the building and its exterior appurtenances. The place had been his recreation ground for the last six months. He had been there every day, watching, advising with quick eye and active brain. He was hand in glove with the builders: he made friends with strangers from afar—Yankees, Californians, purveyors of ready-made houses from Chicago, Norwegians, Icelanders, dwellers in the Indian Archipelago and the South Seas. He knew the place by heart, and it was delightful to Constance to see and understand these practical elements of life under his guidance as she had never seen or understood before. She remembered how, at South Kensington in Sixty-two, she and her husband had idly strolled about the huge building, looking in a trivial way at this and at that Gibson's tinted Venus, the singing bird from Switzerland, Rimmel's perfumed fountain—here a jewel, and there a piece of furniture—shunning the machinery courts as if they were infected—pleased with the picture-galleries, still better pleased at chance meetings with friends, interminable gossip and chatter—leaving the mighty show without one definite idea added to their scanty stock of knowledge.

Poor Mark never could interest himself in anything that did not go on four legs, she thought, remembering her husband's passion for horses and dogs, and how his conversation, starting from whatever point, always harked back to stable or kennel,

It was growing dusk when—after losing her party three or four times—she found them again near the door by which they had all entered.

'I never was so tired of anything in my life,' said Madame Jarzé, utterly exhausted by the fatigue of the show and by the little disagreeables of family intercourse.

'Strange,' exclaimed Constance. 'I, who am generally bored to death by exhibitions, find this one full of interest.'

She shook hands with Ishmael before she got into her carriage—frankly—cordially—with a happy look in those violet-gray eyes, a look which gave a new glory to their loveliness. She was on the point of asking him to call on her some day with his friends the Jarzés, but changed her mind in an instant, as shy as a girl.

'He will come of his own accord,' she thought, for, like a chorus keeping time with the quickened beating of her heart, went the words, 'I know he loves me.' She smiled at him as she took her seat in her barouche. Her eyes were shining on him like sunlight in the gray, dull afternoon as he stood bareheaded, watching the carriage drive away through the keen, piercing wind.

She was to drop the Jarzés on her way home. The thorough-bred grays started at a sharp trot, and swept along the Quay, across the Pont de l'Alma, up the broad avenue into the Champs Elysées.

Madame Jarzé drew her velvet mantle round her with a vehement shiver, while Hortense and Amélie, with their backs to the horses, huddled together under the large black wolf-skin rug. ''Tis in ourselves that we are thus or thus.' To Constance Danetree the atmosphere seemed balmy.

'I wonder that you can drive in an open carriage in such weather,' said Madame Jarzé, complainingly—base ingratitude on her part, since the use of her friend's barouche saved her the cost of a hired vehicle: her *victoria de remise* being chartered only for two hours on Mondays and Thursdays.

'I love the open air,' replied Constance, with the grand manner of a being who could never be cold, whose veins were filled with divine ichor, not with common human blood that curdles and makes gooseflesh at the slightest provocation.

'I had no idea you had a passion for machinery,' said Amélie, pallid with disappointment, anger, jealousy, envy, half the seven deadly sins, and a few of the smaller ones thrown in. Her painted lips quivered, and their false bloom made her pallor seem more ghastly.

'Nor had I until this afternoon,' answered Constance,

easily. 'But the dryest subject becomes interesting when explained by a clever man.'

'Especially when he is not a gray-headed, doddering old professor with green spectacles and a red cotton handkerchief, but a man still in the prime of life, handsome, striking, altogether exceptional,' pursued Amélie.

'That certainly makes the whole business more agreeable,' replied Constance.

She perfectly understood Amélie's drift, and perceived that she had a rival—a rival to the very death—in this young lady with baby-airs and baby-graces, turned-up nose, and flossy-golden hair; but she was not going to be discomfited by a chit. Perhaps, woman as she was, secure in the consciousness of superior beauty, superior accomplishments, even this petty rivalry added a new zest to love.

'I hope we shall see you next Thursday evening,' said Madame Jarzé, as the carriage stopped at the door of the Champs Elysées caravansera, with its gigantic pediment, supported by caryatides in Caen stone.

'Pray come; Monsieur Ishmael will be with us, and can give you another lecture on suspension bridges,' said Amélie.

Constance wavered before replying. What if this were her only chance of meeting him again in the next ten days, and she let it go, just as if a parched traveller in the desert should spill the one cup of water which was to refresh and comfort him? No, this time, she told herself, the thing was certain. He loved her. She had looked into his eyes, once and once only, unawares as they two stood on each side of a cannon in the exhibition yonder, and she had read the thought of his brain, the impulse of his heart, in those dark earnest eyes. She knew that he loved her. And this being so, it was for her to be sought, not to seek. Not for worlds would she lay plans for meeting him, waylay him, as it were. Her duty to herself involved the strictest reserve.

'You are very good,' she said. 'I am full of engagements for Thursday. I'm afraid this is going to be a desperately gay season.'

Amélie gave an impatient little sigh. Alas! she thought, what it is to be born in the purple! There were dinners and balls to which Lady Constance Danetree was bidden at which Monsieur Jarzé's daughters could not hope to appear; and even at those parties to which they were invited there was always the harassing question of toilet, the agonising doubt as to whether their gowns were good enough for the occasion, whether the *parure* of flowers, picked out petal by petal, pinched and repinched by delicate fingers for an industrious hour, did not

after all, look tumbled, faded, second-hand, amidst the freshness of *garnitures* that had been sent from the milliner's half an hour before the fête. That rage for luxury and fine dress which began with the second Empire, and which has been growing ever since, and which rages more furiously than ever after fourteen years of Republican rule, was the cause of many a heart-burning to women of mediocre fortunes. It was the wives and daughters of those days who drove the men upon the Stock Exchange, flung them—hands tied—into the bottomless gulf of speculation, the Tophet of chicanery. The daughters of that time were as the daughters of the horse leech, for ever crying, 'Give.' From the day they left their convents to peep shyly from a mother's wing at the glory and splendour of the world they saw only a people bent on pleasure and amusement, wearing fine clothes, living in fine houses, eating fine dinners, spending fortunes on carriages, hot-house flowers, wax candles, all the elegancies and daintinesses of life, getting their money in many instances mysteriously, as if it were manna dropped from heaven, and, again as if it were manna, never being able to save any against an evil day. What girl of Amélie Jarzé's age could live in the Champs Elysées and see the everlasting procession of elegant carriages rolling by to the Bois in the sunlight of an April afternoon—great ladies, *cocodettes*, actresses, *cocottes*—and not long passionately to be as fine and as beautiful to the eye as these? Vain to remind her that her father was a Government official, highly placed, and earning a salary of fifteen thousand francs; that her mother's *dot* was in all forty thousand francs, and that half of that small capital had been devoured by the expenses of education while the two girls were at school, and the furnishing of this elegant second floor in this brand new house when the girls left school. The recapitulation of hard facts cannot stop a girl's longing for pleasure, for fine clothes, for a carriage, to be as well off as her neighbours.

The actress on the *entre-sol* was one of the sharpest thorns in Amélie's side. She was always observant of her goings out and comings in, her new clothes, her visitors, her Sunday dinner parties. Not on one particular evening in the week came Mademoiselle Arnould's friends. She had her little *levée* every afternoon—officers, *petits crevés*, financiers, artists, journalists flocked to the shrine. Mademoiselle Arnould had introduced *le five o'clock* for these afternoon receptions: cakes, *sorbets*, hot-house grapes, brandy and soda, *absinthe*, vermouth, *pralines*, *marrons glacés*, crystallised rose leaves, *par dessus le tête*, and a revolving silver stand, with a *bouillotte*, half a dozen tiny egg-shell cups and saucers, and a little china pot filled with weakest

tea. That was Mademoiselle's idea of *le five o'clock*. Her admirers thronged to this collation. '*Comme c'est gentil, le five o'clock*,' exclaimed a Saul among the little *crevés*, a six-foot captain of the *cent gardes*, resplendent, dazzling in his uniform, crunching sugared rose petals, adoring *cette belle Arnould*, who was a few years older than his mother.

The windows of the low-ceiled *salons* were obliged to be opened for air. The voices and the laughter came up to another open window on the second floor, at which Amélie stood listening, and watching Mademoiselle's admirers come and go, counting the neat little *coupés* crawling up and down the road. Why was not she an actress, able to command diamonds, new gowns, hot-house flowers by the van-load, dinners from the *traiteur à la mode*—and, best of all, the worship of a court like that which was being held below? Or, if not an actress, why could she not marry a rich man who could give her all these things, *pleines les mains?*

One such man, able to give her all that made life worth having—life as exemplified in this wonderful city of Paris in the year Sixty-seven, and to her mind the only life livable—one such man, and only one, had Heaven sent across her pathway. Millionaires might abound in this golden age of French history, which was fast drifting towards the age of blood and iron, did Amélie but know it; but millionaires, as a rule, declined to come to Madame Jarzé's Thursdays.

Ishmael was more good-natured. Monsieur Jarzé had been fortunate enough to do him a small service a year ago in hurrying a patent through the patent office; and Ishmael went to Madame Jarzé's tea-parties out of sheer gratitude, while on the *jour de l'an* a superb *jardinière* of yellow tulips and creamy hyacinths—a *boule jardinière*, and a thing of value, *bien entendu*, was sent to Madame Jarzé *de la part de son serviteur* Ishmael. These were small things; but what will not hope build upon? Amélie told herself that she was pretty, in the very newest style of prettiness, which might be considered hideous five years hence; that she was fascinating, also in the new style: and what could Ishmael want more in a wife? supposing always that he wanted a wife. Even if the inclination for matrimony did not at present exist, it might surely be evolved by the charms of friendly intercourse with a girl who had a great deal in her. That was the reputation which Amélie had won for herself among her intimates. People spoke of her as a nice lively girl with a great deal in her. And such a girl, everybody agreed, was bound to go far in some direction or other.

As a cat watches a mouse had Amélie watched the conduct and manner of Ishmael to other women. Until that fatal

Thursday when he was introduced to Lady Constance Danetree he had appeared cold as ice. Even the keen eye of jealousy could discover no evil. He had talked to pretty women, to amusing women, to clever women, and there had been no shade in his manner to mark that his fancy was caught or his heart touched by any of them. But the night he met Constance Danetree he had an absorbed air, which was new, and Amélie's bosom was from that hour the abode of the green-eyed one. The afternoon at the Exhibition was a time of torture, for Ishmael openly devoted himself to Lady Constance, and as openly evaded Amélie's somewhat exacting society. Amélie's feelings as she sat with her mother and sister in a box at one of the minor theatres of Paris that evening of the first of April had an intensity which almost touched the sublime. The grief was a petty grief, perhaps, the anguish of a sordid soul, the disappointment of a fortune-hunter baulked of her prey; and yet there was an element of real passion, of unmercenary feeling in the girl's despair. Heartless a year ago, and proud of her heartlessness, she had discovered all at once that she had a heart. Ishmael's fine qualities of mind and person had won her fancy unawares. She had fallen in love with her victim. She had begun the pursuit stimulated only by the most vulgar passions, the ardent desire to be rich, to have a fine house, and a place of mark in this dazzling world of Imperial France. To queen it over her rivals of the *Sacré Cœur*, most of whom were the daughters of much wealthier parents than her own, many of whom had already made brilliant marriages, alliances prepared in advance by family influence, warm nests ready for them to nestle in before the pollutions of the outer world had tarnished the purity of their young wings. From these companions of the past, old comrades and class-mates, Amélie had drunk the cup of humiliation even while profiting greatly by their friendship for her. These young matrons had sent her cards for parties which put to shame poor Madame Jarzé's Thursday evenings. They came to the Champs Elysées in delicious little *coupés*, in victorias of the very newest elegance. They wore gowns from Spricht, the *faiseur à la mode*, hardly understood the possibility of anybody else making a gown that one could wear, just as they wondered that anybody could endure existence on a second floor in a huge barrack occupied by all the world, as it were, while they found life only tolerable in a low Italian villa, guarded by eight-foot walls and hidden in groves of acacia and lilac, within sound of the carriages rolling past the Barrière de l'Etoile. They had country houses; they went to Arcachon, or Biarritz, or Vichy, or Pau directly the Paris season was over; and they patronised Amélie in a way

that made her blood boil, and for which her only recompense was the ability to boast of these stylish friends to acquaintance of meaner rank.

To-night she owed the pleasure of hearing the last successful opera bouffe to her old schoolfellow, Madame de Charleroy, who had a box twice a week, and generally gave it away from sheer capriciousness. But for a heart wrung with the sense of disappointment and failure there is sorry comfort in Offenbach's liveliest strains.

'What rubbishing music it is! and how can people care to stare night after night at a fat woman who wears diamonds instead of clothes!' exclaimed Amélie, impatiently. She had been exploring the house with her opera-glass with the faint hope of seeing Ishmael among the audience.

'You ought not to bring us to see such a performance, mamma; it does us harm to be seen here.'

'I wonder what you would have said if I had left you at home?' retorted the mother, braced tightly in her violet silk gown, a *rossignol* from the last sale of coupons at the Louvre, made up by a cheap dressmaker and trimmed with old point that had belonged to Monsieur Jarzé's mother, and which had been mended so often, that the original work of eighteenth century Flemish nuns was almost lost in the network of reparation. 'People take their daughters almost everywhere nowadays, and if you were not seen at fashionable theatres, you would run the risk of not being seen at all by some of the richest men in Paris.'

Amélie shrugged her shoulders, and turned her face to the stage with an impatient sigh. The one rich man whom she wanted to win was not in the house to-night, and without him the world was a blank.

## CHAPTER XXX

### 'THOUGH THOU SET THY NEST AMONG THE STARS'

Not often in the history of mankind has earth been the theatre of such a scene of splendour as that which glorified Paris in the springtide and early summer of 1867. Perchance, in some far-off Indian city, in ancient Benares, or many-towered Delhi, there might be a greater glitter of gold and gems, statelier processions, Oriental pomp of palanquins and plumes, caparisoned elephants, peacock thrones, turbans luminous with emerald and ruby; but that barbaric show would have had but feeble historic meaning as compared with this meeting of the kings of the West, the statesmen and warriors, the financiers and long-headed schemers, the makers and unmakers of kings. It was a mighty rendezvous of the powers of the civilised world, a gathering of crowned heads, all seemingly intent upon the amusement of the hour, yet each in his heart of hearts intent upon making good use of his opportunities, each determined to turn the occasion to good political account.

The Czar was among the first to come, accompanied by his two sons. It was not long since their elder brother had been laid in his coffin, heaped round with the fairest flowers of Nice, a fair young form, a calm dead face in the midst of roses and lilies, pale image of an Imperial youth which had been but faintly reflected on the stream of life, surviving only in a photograph. William of Prussia was there, flushed with the tremendous victory of Sadowa—victory owed in great part to the neutrality of France, a service as yet unrecompensed, as witness this late *fiasco* of the Luxembourg treaty. Beside the stern soldier-king in the open carriage in which he entered Paris sat the two master-spirits of his kingdom—his mighty General, Moltke, his mightier Chancellor, Bismarck. Who could tell what dreams brooded behind those steel-blue eyes of the senator—large, full, projecting, luminous with the light of a master mind? what hidden plans lurked beneath that air of frank, good fellowship, that outspoken Teutonic simplicity? Cavour, giant among statesmen, was as dead as Machiavelli; but his policy and his capacity lived in his Prussian pupil.

The East sent its potentates to swell the Royal crowd. The Sultan's large grave face, with dark solemn eyes, looked calm and unmoved upon the Imperial show, while his tributary, the Viceroy of Egypt, had come to see what kind of people

these Frenchmen were who wanted to cut a highway for the ships of the world through the sands of the desert. Even far-off Japan was represented by the brother of its secular ruler.

Princes there were amidst that brilliant throng, lighter souls, nursing no deep-laid schemes, hiding no slumbering fires—princes who came honestly to see the show, and to drink the cup of pleasure in that season which seemed one long festival. England's future king was there, in the flower of his youth, kindly, *debonnaire*, keenly intelligent, first favourite among the *élite* of Paris, a popular figure among the populace; the young Princes of Belgium, the Princes of Prussia—they who were to come three years later with fire and sword, bringing in their train death and ruin, burning instead of beauty. There was the Crown Prince of Orange—a *prince pour rire*, and princelings and princesses without number. Never saw the earth such a gathering of its great ones, or a city so fitted for the scene of a festival. The omnipotence of the Emperor, the millions poured out like water by Prefect Haussmann, had made Paris a city of palaces, a place in which even the monuments and statues of the past were scraped and purified to match the whiteness of the new Boulevards—a city planned for the rich, built for the children of pleasure and of folly, as it would seem to Diogenes, looking in the summer eventide along that dazzling line of Boulevards, that mighty thoroughfare which swept in a wide arc from the Bastille to the Champs Elysées, a double range of monumental mansions, theatres, restaurants, cafés, drinking places of every kind and every quality—a fanfare of voices, and music, and chinking glasses, and airy laughter from sundown to midnight, an illumination two leagues long.

Who can wonder that the stranger, blinded by these earthly splendours, steeped in the intoxication that hangs in the very air of such a city, should have ignored the storm-clouds brooding over the Imperial palace—loss of honour beyond all measure, loss of men by thousands, and of money by millions, yonder in Mexico, loss of prestige by the inglorious neutrality of last year, loss of popularity as shown by every new plebiscite? The stranger saw no clouds in that summer sky, dreamt not of a besieged and famished Paris, in which these very streets should run with blood, these fair white stones should be torn up and heaped into barricades, on which men should fight to extinction, hand to hand, brother against brother, in the fury of Civil War. He saw only the glory of the world's carnival; he heard only the sounds of music and dancing, of feasting and revelry.

One of the most magnificent spectacles in that season of splendour was the review of the Imperial Guard in the Bois de Boulogne, when sixty thousand men, under the command of

Maréchal Canrobert, assembled on that very spot where three years later William of Prussia, looking on to-day as guest and ally, was to review his own troops amidst the gloom of a surrendered city. The racecourse was the scene of the review, and a mighty crowd covered the plain. Lady Constance Danetree's barouche was stationed in the front rank of carriages, and not remote from the Imperial party; and on the seat opposite Lady Constance, banked in by huge bouquets of Dijon roses and stephanotis, sat Amélie Jarzé, looking her prettiest in a *bébé* toilette of cream-coloured china crape and pale pink rosebuds.

She was there by one of those series of little accidents which a girl of *nous* knows how to arrange beforehand, and she was assuredly *not* there by the desire of her hostess. Poor Madame Jarzé and Hortense were sitting in their hired victoria afar off in an outer fringe of disreputable smartness and shabby respectability—*voitures de place* crowded with *petits bourgeois* and their families, victorias and four-in-hands gorgeous with the queens and princesses, the dowagers and sweet girl-graduates of the *demi-monde*. But Amélie was here among the top strawberries in the basket, in the midst of *la société rup*—here smiling sweetly at the woman whom of all women upon this earth she most hated. She had contrived it all herself—had contrived to put Lady Constance in a position in which it was impossible *not* to ask her—and she was here triumphant. The end in her mind justified the means. For the rest, having once been cajoled into giving the invitation, Lady Constance thought no more about it. The Jarzé girl was bad style, but not much worse than that Princess of an Austrian house who was then one of the leading lights of Parisian society, and whom Thérésa, the star of the Alcazar, had described as '*aussi canaille que moi*.'

'Poor mother!' sighed Amélie, standing up to survey the crowd through her field-glasses, and perceiving afar off that outermost circle of shabbiness and finery, something like the crowd on the hill-side opposite the grand-stand at Epsom. 'I'm afraid she and Hortense will see nothing but a cloud of dust and those dreadful people in the drags.'

Those 'dreadful people' were the very ladies whose gowns, *coiffures*, and manners this damsel from the *Sacré Cœur* had taken pains to imitate.

'How grave the Czar looks!' exclaimed Amélie, wheeling round to survey the Imperial group. 'Not quite happy. I suppose an Emperor of Russia never feels himself quite secure from bullet and dagger. They say the police have been watching him ever since he came to Paris, that he is encircled with an invisible band of detectives.'

Constance shrugged her shoulders with a preoccupied air. Emperors and dynasties were of no moment to her. She was intent upon discovering one face amidst that vast crowd—Ishmael's face—the face of the man whom she had met several times in society since the beginning of April, but who had never, so far as she could tell, taken the faintest trouble to bring about any such meeting. Taking his conduct as an evidence of his feelings, she could but think that he regarded her with supreme indifference, yet she did not so think. To a sensitive woman there are other tokens of affection, subtler, more precious than outward actions; and in Constance Danetree's heart there was a growing faith in Ishmael's love for her. He might have his own motives for holding himself in check; he might be afraid of the difference in their social rank, doubtful of her as a woman of fashion, perhaps even a coquette. He might be only biding his time. It was not for her to precipitate matters. Not by one tone or one look had the well-trained woman of society betrayed herself. Even Amélie's eyes, sharpened by jealousy, could not penetrate beneath the mask of good manners with which a well-bred woman hides her feelings.

He was there—there among the *elite* of the assemblage. He came to Lady Constance's barouche presently, after having stopped at ever so many carriages on the way. The review began while he was standing there, detained by Amélie, who held him by her incessant prattle, as the mariner held the wedding guest; and the troops once in motion, it would have been difficult for him to recross to his former place. So he stayed, and stood beside Lady Constance's carriage during the whole of the show. Other people came and went, with most of whom he had a bowing acquaintance as one of the most conspicuous men in Paris.

'You have never been in the army, Monsieur?' asked Lady Constance.

'I have not enjoyed that distinction. I drew a lucky number at the beginning of my career, when to have served would have hindered my making my way in life. So far I was lucky.'

'Have you not been lucky in all things?'

'No, Lady Constance, not in all things.'

'And yet you have the reputation of being the most fortunate man in Paris.'

'In Paris to have made money counts for good fortune—everything else is an insignificant detail in the mind of your thoroughbred Parisian. We are a progressive nation. The government of Louis Philippe preached only one doctrine—"Make money." The Emperor goes further, and says, "Make money—anyhow you can."'

This little conversation set Lady Constance wondering.

What was that portion of life in which the great contractor had been unfortunate? Her womanly heart, answering for her, made sure that this misfortune must have something to do with love. He had loved unwisely—unhappily—or had loved one who was dead. The old heart-wounds were only half healed, perhaps, or only just beginning to be healed under a new influence.

The show was over: a gorgeous pageant of a few hours, ending in the golden light of a June afternoon. The Imperial carriages were moving slowly away. Lady Constance's coachman prepared to follow.

'Shall we take you back to Paris?' she asked, and Ishmael accepted.

For the first time, he seated himself in that perfectly-hung barouche, displacing Amélie and her flower-garden. The young lady now nestled by her hostess's side.

It was lovely weather, and the wood was like fairyland, a fairyland of fine carriages and fine clothes, smiling faces, light laughter: beauty, wit, audacity: charlatan, knave, dupe, fool, speculator, trickster, gamester, adventurer of every type; but all of such a brilliant surface, with a flush of hothouse flowers, making a glow of pure bright colour everywhere as in a floral carnival.

Suddenly, amidst the rhythmical trot of horses and musical jingle of harness, amidst the voices and laughter, and the splash of the waterfall yonder, there came from the front—where the Imperial carriages headed the train—the report of a pistol. Then a sudden uproar—a tumult of voices.

What was it? Only an attempt to shoot the Czar, made and failed in ignominiously by one Berezowski, a mad young Polish enthusiast—an honest, simple youth of eighteen summers, who thought God had charged him with the Divine mission of destroying a despot and liberating a people. Unhappily, there are many such false Christs, whose doom is, for the most part, the wheel or the scaffold, wild-horses or the stake. Young Berezowski was luckier, and escaped with penal servitude, much to the displeasure of the Czar, who did not relish this episode in his hospitable entertainment at the Elysée.

The crowd would have massacred Berezowski on the spot in a tumult of enthusiasm for that monarch against whom France had been in arms twelve years ago; but the police intervened and carried the lad off, serenely enduring the anguish of a wrist shattered by the bursting of his pistol, and mildly protesting his regret at being troublesome to a land which had given him a home and a livelihood, and which he loved for its own sake.

The tumult, the confusion, the riding to and fro of general officers, gens-d'armes, functionaries of all grades, gorgeous in

scarlet and gold and plumed helmets, lasted some time, during which the triple rank of carriages stopped.

The reports which reached Lady Constance Danetree at about half a quarter of a mile from the theatre of the event were various and conflicting. First she was told—by her English footman, who knew a little French—that the Czar was killed, and the Emperor Napoleon dangerously wounded. Then a passer-by informed her that the Empress Eugènie had thrown herself in front of the Czar and received the bullet *à pleine poitrine*. Then came a rumour that one of the young princes was shot through the head. Finally, Ishmael, who had alighted and walked to the scene of action, returned with the reassuring news that the bullet had only pierced the nostrils of a horse and slightly wounded a lady on the opposite side of the road. The second barrel had burst in the would-be assassin's hand.

At last the carriages rolled onward again. The Emperor of all the Russias was safe in the Elysée by this time. The sun was an hour nearer the west.

'I think I must give you some tea after all this dust and excitement,' said Lady Constance, smiling at Ishmael as her carriage rolled past her shrubberies of acacia and magnolia and stopped under the large *marquise* in front of her hall door. 'But perhaps you do not drink tea? You would rather go on to the boulevard and enjoy your afternoon *absinthe?*'

'I never take *absinthe*, and I am very fond of tea *à l'Anglaise*.'

'And mine is caravan tea.'

They alighted, and Ishmael, for the first time in his life, crossed Constance Danetree's threshold, crossed it with reluctant feet, yet unable to resist the most potent temptation that had ever assailed him in the whole course of his practical, straightforward life.

He had been in many of the most elegant houses in Paris, had seen pictures, and statues, and flowers, and marble pavements, silk and velvet, cloth of gold, embroideries from China and Persia, Japan and Nagpore, *ad nauseam*, and yet, looking round Lady Constance Danetree's *salon*, with its adjacent boudoir visible through a broad archway, across which a tawny velvet curtain hung carelessly, it seemed to him as if he had never seen the true elegance of home-life before. Here was an interior stamped with the individuality of the woman who lived in it—her piano—unlike other pianos—her bookstands, and low luxurious chairs, her portfolios of prints and photographs—unlike other bookstands, and chairs, and portfolios—her grouping of hothouse flowers, the table at which she wrote, her work-tables, her cosy corners, half in shadow, yet glowing with Oriental colour, her open fire-place with its bank of exotic greenery and

rare old amber Satsuma jars—everywhere the traces of a woman's taste; and, like a note of life and friendliness, the three dogs grouped on a huge Polar bear-skin in front of the wide sunny window.

Two tall and solemn footmen of the true British breed brought in a tea-table with Queen Anne urn and old English china, and Lady Constance poured out the tea. Her version of *le five o'clock* was a much simpler reading than that of Madame Arnould, on the *entre-sol* in the Champs Elysées. Amélie squatted gracefully on a low stool at Constance's feet.

'I think this English institution of five o'clock is positively charming,' she said. 'It is simply the pleasantest hour of the day; but I never expected to see a business man like Monsieur Ishmael waste his time upon drinking tea with two ladies.'

'It is once in a lifetime,' answered Ishmael, with his grave smile, a beautiful smile, which lighted the strongly-marked face with a sudden glow. 'There must be an oasis in every desert.'

'And you call this a green spot in life—to sit here in Lady Constance's *salon:* you who have the key to all the finest houses in Paris.'

I do not profess to have any such key, Mademoiselle.'

'Oh, but you have. You have the golden key which opens all the doors of the great world. You and the Rothschilds can go anywhere, do anything, say anything: whatever you do or say will be right. If my father were only like you instead of being a petty official pettily paid.'

She gave a little impatient sigh, and stopped herself, feeling that she had gone too far. 'After all, money is a poor thing,' she said; 'it cannot buy happiness. I know some of my school-fellows married for money who are miserable. Heaven protect me from such a fate as theirs.'

'But are not all marriages nowadays more or less a question of ways and means?' inquired Ishmael. 'I have only studied the institution from afar, as a disinterested observer, yet it seems to me that wedlock under the second Empire means the union of incomes rather than of hearts.'

'And can you see such a state of things without horror?' exclaimed Amélie, while Lady Constance Danetree listened in silence, reclining in her chair, one white tapering hand caressing the Pomeranian's still whiter coat, the left hand supporting her firmly-rounded chin—self-possessed, self-contained, the image of passionless womanhood.

'It cannot concern me what stakes the players play for—hearts or diamonds,' answered Ishmael; 'I am only a looker-on at the game. I shall never marry.'

Not a ripple of emotion stirred Constance Danetree's features.

The hand which smoothed the favourite's silken coat never faltered in its slow monotonous movement; there was not a quiver of sculptured eyelids or sculptured lips. The face—statue-like in its calm beauty—betrayed nothing.

And yet this deliberate utterance of a deliberate resolve was like a blow struck at the heart of the woman who sat there in such statuesque repose, caressing her lap-dog. It meant the fall of her castle in the air, the end of all her dreams. It meant, perhaps, that she had been duped and fooled by her own vanity. For Amélie the blow was no less crushing; and she was not so skilled in the concealment of her feelings, or, it may be, was wanting in the heroic temperament.

'That is a resolution *pour rire*,' she exclaimed, with a little half-hysterical laugh. 'Whenever, in my brief experience, I have heard a man or a woman solemnly announce the determination never to marry, I have generally discovered afterwards that he or she was at that very moment on the high road to the altar. A widower usually vows as much, and you will own that the widower who swears hardest, who tells you that his heart lies buried in the grave of his dead wife, is always the first to marry again. It is a fatal symptom.'

'There are men who swear for the love of swearing,' answered Ishmael. 'There are circumstances in my past life, the bitter memories of a great sorrow, which render marriage impossible for me. You may believe, Mademoiselle, that, for once in your life, you have heard a man swear in good faith. I shall keep my vow.'

He took up his hat and cane, and offered his hand to Lady Constance, who half rose, with a delicious air of languor and fatigue, and put her cool white hand in his. She could but notice that his was cold as ice.

'Forgive me for wearying you with such egotistical prosings,' he said, as they shook hands.

'You have not wearied me: I am always interested in my fellow-creatures.'

'But you are looking pale and exhausted: I fear it is I who have tired you.'

'Not at all. The sun, and the dust, and the show have been tiresome, that is all. Good-bye.'

She gave him a gracious curtsey as he went out at the door.

Good-bye, love; good-bye, hope; good-bye, the fair future we two were to have shared! That was what was meant by those two syllables spoken by smiling lips.

'She could not have cared a straw for him,' thought Amélie watchful of a rival even in the midst of her own agitations.

'My dear Amélie, the horses are waiting to take you home,

and it is bad for them to stand long after such a day,' said Constance. 'Do you think you would mind going at once? I am due at a dinner at the English Embassy, and then there is the ball at the Hôtel de Ville, where I suppose I must put in an appearance; and I ought to rest a little.'

'How good of you to keep the horses for me! I am going this instant,' replied Amélie. 'You talk of the ball as if it were a burden; and they say it will be the grandest sight that has ever been seen in Paris, and yet nothing compared to the ball to-morrow night at the Tuileries. Papa has told us all about it: he has had a good deal to do with the arrangements. The gardens are to be illuminated with fifty thousand gas jets, and there will be the electric light, and Bengal fires—a perfect fairy-land.'

'My experience of such balls is, that one has to sit in one's carriage for two or three hours within a quarter of a mile of the palace gates, hearing gens-d'armes give impossible orders, and coachmen grumble and swear; and that one finally reaches the scene of the festival in a state of utter exhaustion,' said Constance, wearily. 'But I suppose I shall have to go.'

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## CHAPTER XXXI

### 'THESE ARE THE MEN THAT DEVISE MISCHIEF'

ISHMAEL turned his back upon the Imperial wood with its villas and gardens, and its three broad avenues. The triumphal arch was all aglow with the western sunlight. The lawns and flowers, the foliage and fountains of the Champs Elysées were all steeped in the same golden light. The train of carriages was still rolling on, eastward, westward; these back to the city, those out to the wood, carrying happy, idle people to dine *al fresco* at the restaurant by the cascade. The footways were crowded with pedestrians; the toy-shops, and sweet-shops, and open-air Alcazar, the Pavillon de l'Horloge, all the singing places and pleasure haunts were beginning to glitter with lamps even in

the midst of that golden light. Children were playing, organs grinding, flowers breathing perfume, clouds of dust shining like a golden haze—a world of gladness and sunset glory.

Ishmael walked at a brisk pace through the crowd, looking neither to the right nor to the left, hardly conscious of the gaiety around him, the throng of passers-by. His eyes were fixed, looking steadily in front of him, yet unseeing. He was very pale, and his brows were set in a line that meant sternest resolve.

Yes, he had spoken. He had told the loveliest, the proudest, the most exquisite of women that it was not for him to aspire to her hand. He had told that one woman whom he passionately loved that it was for him to stand aloof from her; that even were she tempted to stoop from her dazzling height of pride and beauty so low as to crown him with her love, he could not accept the blessing and the glory. His fate was fixed, a destiny of loneliness and self-sacrifice.

What else could he have done? he asked himself this evening, in the sundown, as he threaded the crowd, now across the broad place of fountains and statues, by symbolic Strasbourg, a marble maiden with a coronet of towers, to be crowned and garlanded later by a frantic crowd, swearing to fight and fall for her, and anon to be veiled in sables—an emblem of shame and of mourning—past the Tuileries, the chestnut groves, under which children were flying bright-coloured balloons—the shining windows, the gilded railings, while yonder, across the river, shone the golden dome of the soldiers' hospital, whence came beat of drum and blare of trumpet sounding the *retraite*. Ishmael moved athwart the familiar scene without seeing it, and walked at a still faster pace along the Rue de Rivoli under the shadow of the Louvre.

What else could he have done but declare his resolve never to marry—he whose runaway wife might be living still, might come forth from her hiding-place to claim him on his wedding day, were he weak enough to wed again without due evidence of her death. He had had no such evidence yet, though he had taken considerable trouble to obtain it; and he might have hugged himself in the belief that, since Pâquerette had given no sign of her existence during the last seven years, she must needs be dead. Were she living and in poverty, she would most likely have asked for aid from his wealth; were she living and prosperous, she would surely have been more easily traced. His search for the betrayer had been as earnest as his search for the victim, but neither quest had succeeded. This was how he had argued the question in his own mind over and over again, and yet the thing was all dark to him, and he told himself that, as a

man of honour, he was forbidden to marry. He was still the husband of Pâquerette.

And to marry *her*, Constance Danetree, at such a hazard, to sully her proud and pure name by doubtful nuptials—no, *that* he could not do. Better to suffer the anguish of resigning her—better to bear his own lonely lot to the end.

He followed the Rue de Rivoli as far as the Palais Royal, and thence struck into the Rue St. Honoré, along which busy thoroughfare, brightening already with lamplit shop windows, he made his way to that still busier quarter of Paris which lies around the great glass pavilions of the central markets, and the old, old Pointe St. Eustache, historic ground, where once the swollen soil of the cemetery of the Innocents seethed and rankled with the rotting dead, and sent forth its plague-poison to slay the living; where the heaped-up coffins, thrust one above another, crammed and gorged the loathsome earth until, by the very weight of its putrid burden, it burst the wall of an adjacent dwelling-house and scared the occupant by the spectacle of a cellar filled with the ghastly relics of the dead.

At a corner of the Rue Pirouette Ishmael entered a low, dark wine-shop, where half-a-dozen blouses sat drinking and smoking in the dim light. He nodded to the woman at the counter, passed through the shop, and went up a winding staircase in the corner.

A man stopped him at the top of the stairs. '*Es tu solide?*' he asked.

'*Jusqu'à la Rue de Jérusalem*,' replied Ishmael, and passed on to a large room on the first floor, whence came the sound of a resonant voice and a dense cloud of rank tobacco.

He pushed open the door and went in. The room was crowded with men of all ages, and, by their aspect, of almost every trade and profession; men in blouses and men in broadcloth; bronzed and rugged men who work with their hands; pallid weaklings who work with their brains. The blouses and weather-tanned faces predominated in number and bulk; but the pallid brows and the well-worn frock-coats were the stronger influence.

These were the speakers, the dreamers, the enthusiasts—the Utopians who believed that the Society of the Cercle du Prolo, founded in 1831 under another name, now about to be affiliated with the International, was to bring to pass that Socialist millennium of equal fortunes, of direct legislation by the people, of which French workmen have been thinking ever since they learned how to think.

Thirteen years ago Ishmael had been a voice of power in a

certain secret society called La Loque, out of which had been developed this club of the Prolo. He had been on the side of temperance, thrift, moderation—all those virtues which make the artizan class strong in the land. He had been popular when he was a journeyman toiler like the majority, and wore a blouse, which was only ever so much cleaner than the normal blouse. The time came when he wore a coat, and was known to be a rich man employing others to work for him. Then his popularity began to wane. His moderation was called half-heartedness, his loyalty to the old ideas was doubted, and his strong common-sense, which saw both sides of every question, was denounced as the craven spirit of the bourgeois, who thrives and fattens upon the sweat of other men's brows.

He spoke, and spoke bravely, bore the brunt of his old comrades' disfavour, bearded the lion of Socialism in his den; showed his friends where they were unwise, where they asked too much of the State and of their masters; but a time came when he was saluted with a storm of groans and hisses, when his success was cast in his face as a reproach and a disgrace—when he was accused of underhand dealings, falsehood, dishonesty even. He flung these vile insinuations back upon his accusers, challenged them to show a single stain upon his career, and shook the dust of the club from his feet. And now, to-night, he came to his old place, after an interval of years, summoned by a circular which had been sent to him in common with all the other Prolos, to invite discussion as to the proposed affiliation of the club to the great International Society, founded in 1862, encouraged by the favour of the Emperor himself, and already a mighty force in civilised Europe.

The meeting of to-night was a feverish one. There were some among the Prolos who resented the loss of their own individuality, the lessening of their own importance, which must needs follow this amalgamation of the old and small society with the new and great one. These cockle-shells did not care to lose their own sense of importance by being enrolled in a fleet of three-masters. Whelmed in the great whirlpool of European Democracy, this little club of Parisian orators would be as a handful of hazel-nuts flung into the Horseshoe Fall.

There were some who dreaded this loss of individuality for vanity's sake, others who shrank from it for principle's sake, and who revolted against the iron discipline, the mechanical drill involved in the Karl-Marxian theory of Socialism; and amongst these latter was Ishmael.

He who had not crossed the threshold of that room for seven years came there to-night to protest against the contemplated change. He stood in the group by the doorway, unnoticed and

unknown, until the speaker had finished, and then he quietly shouldered his way through the crowd and advanced to the tribune. He took off his hat and faced the assembly, taller by half a head than the majority—a man of men.

Dressed as he had dressed for the review, in a coat of finest cloth and newest fashion, with the gardenia which he had put in his button-hole in the Rue Castiglione, remembering how Lady Constance Danetree had worn those white waxen blossoms on her bosom on each occasion of their meeting, plainly and soberly clad withal, with the air of statesman and thinker rather than of fribble or fop, yet the look of him as he stood before them in the flush and power of his manhood set the teeth of those keen Democrats on edge. This was the capitalist, the 'bourgeois,' the hated one, the employer of labour, the man who wallowed in wealth which represented the sweat of other men's brows.

An angry murmur ran round the crowded room like the faint rumbling of distant thunder, and then a solitary hiss, sharp, venomous, flew out at him like a forked tongue, seemed to quiver in the air, and then to strike straight at his breast.

'I am not afraid of your hisses, friends!' he said, 'but I am sorry for your want of sense. I am not here to plead the cause of capital against labour, the rights of the employer as against the rights of the employed. That is an old question which we have argued before to-night. I am here to protest against the amalgamation of this little honest-hearted society with the most pernicious and fatal association which ever threatened the peace of civilised Europe.'

This was a bold attack, for in 1867 the International was in the flower of its youth. There had been a congress of workmen of all nations at Geneva; there was to be a congress at Lausanne in September. The International was on the side of universal peace: it promised a millennium for the working man and the world at large; it offered a dazzling prospect of equal rights; the abolition of wages in favour of co-operation; the redemption of woman from the necessity of labour; free education, universal enlightenment. For the old-established journeymen's tour of France, for the German *wanderjahr*, was to be substituted the tour of Europe, enlarging the ideas of the mechanic by contact with foreign nations.

The International had so far acted with moderation, for while sustaining the metal-workers in their long strike, and while putting upon its black books every firm which dismissed any member of the Society, it had lifted up its voice boldly against the workmen at Roubaix when they destroyed their machinery and set fire to their workshops.

So far the Society seemed to have acted only for good; but

behind the association of many men Ishmael saw the working of one mind, and that the mind of a dangerous visionary. He saw the shadow of German despotism, a despotism of the Socialist as perilous as the despotism of the monarch ; and it was against this that he spoke.

He denounced Karl Marx and his theories, he indicated the dangers they involve, demonstrated their falsehood, their impossibility. The majority of his hearers knew little or nothing about Karl Marx and his system, but they were most of them prejudiced against an old comrade who had grown rich. Ishmael represented the Patron, the Bourgeois, the Enemy. His speech provoked a storm of hisses, groans, abuse. But the full sonorous voice thundered on, every sentence coming with the force of a sledge-hammer. Dauntless and undaunted, he stood before them to the last, till he had said his ultimate word ; then, with a smile, half friendly, half scornful, he bowed to his auditors, amongst whom but a small minority were in his favour, put on his hat and left the room.

It was past nine when he went out into the network of old streets, and the illuminated dial of St. Eustache shone pale in the summer twilight. The year was at that lovely season when night is almost unknown. The old streets of Paris had a dusky look in the gray eventide, but they were not yet dark.

Ishmael had left the club about ten minutes, when a man close behind him said, in a low confidential voice :

'Has Monsieur Ishmael forgotten an old member of the Cercle du Prolo, whom he once employed in a delicate matter?'

Ishmael turned quickly, and recognised a man who had been made known to him thirteen years ago as a member of that semi-professional fraternity which ferrets out domestic secrets —the police of private life—and who had been his agent in the endeavour to find Pâquerette. The man had travelled half over France upon that quest, had spent a good deal of his employer's money without arriving at any successful result. He had been apparently on the scent many times, had brought back information that seemed genuine, but the end was failure ; and after paying him from first to last a considerable sum, Ishmael had dismissed him seven years ago, very much disposed to think him an impostor.

And now this same man, whom he had not seen for years, but of whom, by a strange coincidence, he had been thinking within the last two hours—this man, Dumont, stood before him in the June twilight, breathing *absinthe*, and clothed on with shabbiness.

It seemed to Ishmael as if the man had sprung out of the very paving stones in answer to his own thought—had risen

rom the ground at his bidding like an evil spirit at the touch of a necromancer's wand. He had despised the man for his profligate habits in years gone by, respecting him just a little at the same time for his cleverness. He had treated him with a certain familiarity and good fellowship, as between men of the same opinions, linked by the same brotherhood ; but the gulf between them had widened since that time. It was within the last seven years that Ishmael had allowed himself to be tempted into society, had taken the place to which his wealth and his talents entitled him. And while Ishmael had taken a higher position, the man Dumont had sunk to a lower grade—the grade of the shirtless and houseless—the lost tribes of Paris, whose children sleep under bridges and in shadowy doorways, who eat garbage, and whose life is a perpetual game of hide-and-seek with the police.

He was a strange-looking man, this Dumont—strange because, despite his threadbare coat and greasy hat, his absence of linen and frouzy neckerchief—despite the traces of drunkenness and debauchery, too palpable in the tallowy tints of the soddened face, the inflamed eyelids, and purple lips—despite the livery of vice, the creature looked as if once, in some remote period of life, he had been a gentleman. He held himself like a gentleman ; he had the intonation of a gentleman ; he had the arched instep, the well-cut features, the lean tapering hand and wrist of a gentleman. For the rest he was so squalid and so sickly a spectacle as he stood there in the cold gray light, that he might be taken for a man who had died and been buried, and had been dug out of the common grave to be galvanized into a factitious life by some kind of scientific jugglery.

'What do you know of the Prolos?' asked Ishmael, contemptuously.

'What do I know? I have been one of them for six and thirty years. I was one of them—ay, and a leading light too—at the foundation of the society in '31, when the workmen of Paris began to discover that the glorious revolution of July did not mean Socialism, that they were no better off under the King of the French than they had been under the King of France, when that great reservoir of humanity the Faubourg Saint-Antoine began to grow ruffled and stormy. In those days the Prolétaires were a little band of men who met once a week in a wine-shop in the Rue Sainte-Marguerite, and who called themselves the *Société de la Loque.* "*La loque en avant*" was their war-cry. I was a speaker then, Monsieur Ishmael—yes, by Heaven, as eloquent an orator as you were to-night. I have always been true to my colours ; I am true to them now. It is you who are false, Monsieur Ishmael ; you who have grown rich under the

rule of a despot and have left off caring for the cause of liberty.'

'This is no place for talking politics,' said Ishmael. 'You had better come to my house in the Place Royale two hours hence, and I will talk as much as you like. You look poor, Dumont.'

'It would be very strange if I looked rich.'

'Well, I may be able to give you some profitable employment, perhaps. You may as well dine or sup in the meantime.'

'It will be at least a novel sensation,' answered the man called Dumont, accepting Ishmael's napoleon.

Two hours later the man was ushered into Ishmael's library in the Place Royale, a spacious panelled room, furnished with heavy oak book-cases, solid oak chairs, and an immense office table covered with papers, plans, and drawings, and lighted by two large shaded lamps.

'Sit down,' said Ishmael, pointing to an arm-chair by the empty hearth. 'You told me yonder, two hours ago, that I was false to the cause of my fellow-workmen. I tell you that I am as true to that cause now that I am a rich man as ever I was as a poor man. But I do not give in my adherence to Karl Marx and his crew.'

'You had better,' answered the other, drily. 'They are coming to the front.'

'I am no collectivist.'

'No, you are a rich man; you are a capitalist; you believe in your divine right to profit by other men's labour, to wallow in accumulated capital—which is only another name for unpaid labour—to heap up a colossal fortune by the help of other men's thews and sinews.'

'I have not spared my own labour of head or hand. There might have been neither work nor wages for those other men if my enterprise had not set the ball rolling.'

'No; but you have made millions, and they are exactly where they were before the ball began to roll,' answered the man. 'That's what Karl Marx and his crew want to put an end to—the aggregation of profits in the pockets of one man. Why should the keystone of the arch be a diamond, and all the other stones only common stone?'

'Perhaps, because, without the keystone, the arch would tumble to pieces.'

'Ah! but we shall construct all future arches on a better principle. Every great enterprise shall be undertaken by a body of men, each risking his labour, each reaping an equal share of the profits. Every manufactory shall be carried on by the operatives. Wealth shall be distributed.'

'Utopian!' interrupted Ishmael. 'The universe itself was formed from a nucleus. There must be a beginning—there must be a master-mind—there must be rich men and poor men under Empire or Republic. Make all men equal at sunrise and at sundown there would be differences. And again, that concentration of capital, of which you Socialists complain, is, after all, the great bond of union. In co-operative labour the individual risks would not be large enough to ensure that intensity of purpose without which there can be no success in trade. The capitalist takes gigantic risks and works harder than any of his men. If there come the menace of ruin, it is he who must face the dark hour, grapple with the danger and overcome it. Would a herd of men, held together by the vague chances of divided profits—never sure of their bread—meet misfortune as bravely or work as earnestly? I think not. But I did not ask you here to talk political economy. I want you to work for me again as you worked for me some years ago.'

'To resume my hunt for your wife?'

'Yes. I want to know where she is if she still lives. I want the evidence of her death if she is dead.'

'Difficult, rather. When I came upon the trace of her at Marseilles, a singer at a *café-chantant* near the Quay, she had changed her name three times. She had made her *début* at Brussels in opera as Mademoiselle Callogne; she had acted with a strolling company as Madame Sévry; she appeared at Marseilles as Bonita—nothing but that—Bonita, or la Bonita. She was a star in the little company at the *café-chantant*, a favourite with an audience which consisted chiefly of seamen, mariners of all nations and of all colours—a frightful hole! Your wife had left Marseilles when I discovered her identity with this Mademoiselle Bonita, a discovery which, as you may remember, I only made through tracing Hector de Valnois—no easy matter, for he had sunk pretty low by that time, this sprig of a noble house,' with infinite scorn.

'And they had left Marseilles in a steamer for Valparaiso a week before you got there! You employed an agent in that city to hunt them down, but without avail,' interrupted Ishmael, impatiently. 'Why go over old ground?'

'I am only picking up the threads in order to make a fresh start,' answered the other. 'Let me see, Monsieur Ishmael; it was six years after Madame ran away from you that I heard of her at Marseilles, and this Monsieur de Valnois had been faithful to her all that time—through good and evil fortune. There was something very real in their passion, you see. It survived empty pockets, hard fare, the ups and downs of a Bohemian career. Monsieur earned a little money by his pen,

Madame a little by her pretty voice. Sometimes one was ill, sometimes both were penniless. It was not a path of roses. But they were true to each other all those years.'

'I did not invite you to be eloquent upon their fidelity. You heard of my wife's intended voyage to Valparaiso. You never traced her beyond the steamer that was to take her there. I want you to take up the thread you dropped then——'

'After seven years. It will not be easy. Strange that you should be indifferent to Madame's fate all these years, and suddenly awaken to an eager interest in it. Forgive my frankness. I speak as Prolo to Prolo.'

'Life is full of strangeness; but you need not concern yourself about my motives. Find my wife for me, or bring me the evidence of her death, and I will give you five thousand francs over and above the salary you will draw from me while you are employed in the quest.'

'And my expenses? They will be stiff. I see no better way of beginning than by going to Valparaiso. Where the local police failed a man bred in Paris may succeed. I ought to have gone there seven years ago—only your interest in the chase seemed to have cooled just then.'

'I was wearied by failure. I trusted to the chapter of accidents. I thought that, if she were penniless, deserted, she would come to me of her own accord for aid, for shelter—come to me as the hare winds back to her form, as her unhappy mother went to that wretched den in the Rue Sombreuil.'

He said this in a low voice, to himself rather than to Dumont.

The ex-police agent looked at him curiously, with keenly-questioning eyes.

'The Rue Sombreuil!' he echoed. 'Did your wife's mother ever live in the Rue Sombreuil?'

'She was born there, and died there in the flower of her youth—a withered flower, cut down untimely. Why do you stare, man? I never pretended that my wife was of good birth. I only told you that she was a pure and innocent woman till that false friend of mine corrupted her. She was a daughter of the people, poor child. Her mother was a *grisette*, who ran away with some nameless scoundrel; her grandfather was an *ebéniste*, called Lemoine, a drunken rascal, who lived from hand to mouth. Strange that so fair a flower should have come from so foul a seed! My wife had the air and the instincts of a lady. Who shall say that these things are hereditary?'

'She may have had good blood on the father's side,' said the other, thoughtfully. 'Do you know anything about her father?'

'Only that he was a villain. Enough of the past: it is too

full of pain and bitterness for me to be fond of talking about it. Find me my wife if you can. You know the reward.'

'That reward would be the same for the evidence of her death?' asked the other, with a faint sneer. 'You will give as much for bad news as for good?'

'As much for one as for the other. I pay for certainty.'

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## CHAPTER XXXII

### 'AND THE GREAT MAN HUMBLETH HIMSELF'

MANY young women in the matrimonial hunting-field would have given up the chase on the strength of such a protest as that made by Ishmael when, in grave and deliberate accents, he declared his determination to live and die a bachelor; but that ardent young sportswoman, Amélie Jarzé, was not so easily put off the scent. She was discouraged, disheartened, vexed, and angry—jealous of Lady Constance Danetree's superior influence; but she did not despair. She talked the subject over with her sister Hortense during one of those oases of friendly feeling which sometimes diversified the arid desert of sisterly antagonism.

'There must be something queer in his past life,' said the damsel, when she had described that little episode at the five o'clock tea—'a low intrigue, a low marriage even. He had such a gloomy air when he said that he should never marry—not the air of a man who does not wish to marry, but of a man who dare not marry. There is a secret, I am certain. How strange that people should know so little about his antecedents. I have questioned everybody as far as I could venture; but they all tell the same story—a workman, living among herds of other workmen out at Belleville—till seven years ago, when he burst upon Paris like a meteor. He had a hand in all the improvements in Algiers. The Emperor decorated him after the completion of a great railway bridge somewhere in Auvergne; and then people found out that he was one of the greatest practical engineers of the age, and immensely rich,

which was much more to the purpose; and then everybody began to ask him to dinner. Of his private life before that time people in society seem to know actually nothing.'

'Why should they know anything?' asked Hortense, with a supercilious air. 'What is a workman's private life?—breakfast and dinner, and a bath on Sunday.'

'I want to know if he was married or single in those days.'

'I am told that Parisian workmen rarely marry,' said Hortense, placidly.

It was in vain that Amélie speculated and wondered. She was no nearer arriving at any certainty as to the motive of Ishmael's declaration. But she was determined not to relinquish the chase on account of that assertion of his. After all, it might mean little or nothing—a mere expression of egotism intended to enhance the importance of the speaker.

'I suppose he thinks we are all dying for him,' she said to herself.

She wrote him a little note on the next Wednesday—the dearest little note on the last fashionable paper, with a painted swallow in the corner—a note in an elegant slanting penmanship, *à l'Anglaise*, to remind him of Madame Jarzé's Thursdays, which he had so long forgotten. A postscript informed him that Lady Constance Danetree had promised to put in an appearance early, and that Mademoiselle Betsy, who had created a furor at a cafe-concert in the Faubourg du Temple, was to sing her famous song, 'Décrochez moi ça,' the song she had lately had the honour of singing at the Tuileries before a cluster of crowned heads, and as a reward for which a costly bracelet had been clasped upon her wrist by the Imperial fingers.

Even the temptation thus held out did not attract Ishmael to the second floor in the Champs Elysées. He replied politely to Mademoiselle Jarzé's letter, informing her that the numerous public works in which he was interested kept him closely occupied, and rendered visiting and all social pleasures impossible for him. There was a tone of decision about this letter which made even Amélie feel that the case was hopeless.

'There is somebody or something in the background,' she said to herself; 'and the man cannot marry. Well, as he evidently doesn't want to marry me, I'm very glad he is not able to marry Lady Constance Danetree.'

Amélie was angry, chagrined, disappointed, but she was not the kind of young person to cut off her back hair, or clothe herself in sackcloth because of her disappointment, especially in the year of an International Exhibition, when Paris, the capital of universal pleasure, was at its best and gayest. So, failing the keen rapture of the chase, with Ishmael for her quarry, she was

fain to get what amusement she could out of the easy admirers within her reach.

Chief and most favoured among these was Armand de Kératry, the young man who had, in his own estimation, reached the climax of literary fame when he saw his first vaudeville produced with success at the Palais Royal. From that hour he lived only to write vaudevilles. Waking and sleeping, his mind laboured upon jokes and couplets, critical concatenations in the family circle, foolish or jealous husbands, giddy wives, amusingly treacherous friends. He liked Amélie, chiefly because she was of the Palais Royal type. She was his lay figure—the model for his giddy young wives and foolish virgins. He reproduced her impertinences, her unconscious or affectedly unconscious *double-entendres*, accentuated with the heightened colouring of the theatre. He courted her society, was rarely missing from one of Madame Jarzé's Thursdays, albeit other *gandins* of his class affected to despise those functions. He was to be seen and heard whispering and giggling in a corner with Amélie, while Madame Jarzé, provided there were no more eligible man present, was amiably unconscious of their little indiscretions.

'They have known each other so long, foolish children,' she explained ; ' they are like brother and sister.'

As a successful playwright, on friendly terms with other playwrights, Monsieur de Kératry got occasional admissions for one of the theatres which were not filled to overflowing, and these he presented to Madame Jarzé, thus keeping Amélie *au courant* of that lighter dramatic art in which he hoped to distinguish himself. Amélie soon acquired the knowingness of an experienced *cabotine*, and was eager to help her admirer with suggestions and inventions of her own active little brain. Pleased with her interest in his work, he brought his new vaudeville in his pocket when he dropped in for an extempore 'five o'clock' of weak tea and Neapolitan biscuits *chez* Madame Jarzé, having first refreshed himself with a *polichinelle* of vermouth or curaçoa at that much gayer 'five o'clock' *chez* Madame Arnould, on the *entre-sol*. He read his last scene to Amélie in a little nook apart by the open window, and they laughed over his rather racy jokes together in good fellowship. Armand treated the damsel altogether *en bon garçon*, and did not apologise for the somewhat hazardous situations in his play.

Having laughed over the final scene, she was eager to know when the new piece was to be produced.

'Not for ages,' replied Kératry. 'It has to go to the *teinturier* first, to be remodelled. That man has a knowledge of stage effects which I shall never acquire. It is as much an

instinct as the result of long experience in dramatic criticism. He will pull all these scenes to pieces—cut out hundreds of my happiest lines—introduce half-a-dozen hackneyed situations, and make the thing actable. It is a humiliating process to undergo; but it answered with my first play, and I hope it may answer with my second.'

'I don't believe anybody in Paris can know more about dramatic effect than you,' said Amélie, making her blue eyes as big as possible, and favouring Armand with a look of child-like worship, which she had hitherto reserved for Ishmael. 'How I should like to see this *teinturier*,' she added, with a touch of frivolity. 'He must be such a curious person.'

'He is a curious person, and lives in a curious den, and wears a curious coat,' answered Armand; 'but he is a kind of eccentricity that is uncommonly common in Paris—the eccentricity of hard-upishness, *l'homme dans la dêche*.'

'Ah!' sighed Amélie, 'that is not an unknown complaint even in the Champs Elysées, and I think we get it in a severer form on this side of the Seine because we have to keep up appearances. But I should so like to see this poor Monsieur——'

'Nimporte—that is the name he has given himself, Jean Nimporte. But if he is the author of *Mes Nuits Blanches*, as I have been told he is, his real name is de Valnois, and he comes of a good Provençal family. He encourages no inquiries as to his antecedents, and never talks of his past life. He smokes like a factory chimney, and I believe he is softening his brain with a continual course of *absinthe*. I am really sorry for him; one can see that he was once a gentleman.'

'Do bring him here some day.'

'Bring him here! Impossible! He seldom goes out till after dark—he has not a presentable coat belonging to him; and if I were to offer to give him one, he would throw it out on the landing like that English philosopher you may have read of, who threw away a pair of new boots which benevolence left at his door when he was a penniless collegian. You can do nothing for a fallen angel like Jean Nimporte.'

'The more you say about him the more do I languish to see him,' exclaimed Amélie.

'Nothing easier if you are the *bon garçon* I take you for.'

'I am always *bon garçon* with you.'

'Then I will introduce you to my *teinturier* to-morrow. Tell Madame that you are going to spend the morning with Lady Constance Danetree. She will hardly object to your going so short a distance alone; or, if you must go under convoy of your *bonne*, leave the *bonne* at Lady Constance's gate, and wait for

me in the shrubbery. I will be on the watch, and will join you directly the coast is clear. I shall have a fly waiting, and I will carry you off to the Quartier Latin, where you shall see life. We will breakfast together at one of the students' restaurants on the Boul Mich.'

'Boul Mich?'

'Boulevard St. Michel—popular contraction, that's all; and after breakfast we will go and see Jean Nimporte.'

'But it will be dreadful—to go out alone with you——'

'A friend you have known almost from childhood!'

'To breakfast with you at a restaurant——'

'One must eat when one is hungry. Come, Amélie, you know you can trust me.'

'With all my heart. But the world! What would people say if they saw us together?'

'Only that you have the courage of your opinions, like those charming girls from New York, who are not afraid to be their own chaperons. The most innocent girls are always the boldest. Remember Una. Besides, you can keep your veil down.'

'I will come,' said Amélie, with a radiant smile; 'and I shall not wear a veil. I have the courage of my opinions, and one of those opinions is a perfect belief in you.'

This was a master-stroke. Monsieur de Kératry was enchanted. The girl's frankness, the spice of adventure that flavoured the whole thing, the flattery implied in her confidence, all gratified that vanity which is the ruling passion alike of fool and philosopher.

At eleven o'clock next morning Amélie announced her intention of spending the day with Lady Constance Danetree. They had met at a reception the night before, and there was no reason why such an engagement should not have been made between them, so maternal suspicions were in no wise excited. There was a slight discussion as to whether Amélie could or could not go so far as the other side of the Arch without escort; but as Monsieur Jarzé had gone to his office, and the *bonne's* services were urgently required indoors, it was finally decided that she could.

Amélie dressed herself with a dainty simplicity, which became her better than her finest feathers. A holland frock, prettily made, and fresh from the laundress, a knot or two of scarlet ribbon to relieve the neutral tint of the frock, a little brown straw toque, with a bunch of scarlet berries, a holland parasol, and long Swede gloves at a time when long gloves were a distinction.

'You are simply perfect,' exclaimed Kératry, meeting her just beyond the Arch, in the broad sunny space whence diverge the

avenues of the Parisian wood. 'But I hope you don't think you look like a *grisette*, or even a *petite bourgeoise, par exemple.* I never saw you appear so distinguished.'

He had a hired victoria in waiting, into which he handed his companion, a little frightened, in spite of her audacity, at the tremendous impropriety she was about to commit, and expecting to see an acquaintance in every passer-by. She had no veil, but, happily, she had her large holland sunshade, and under that shelter she felt she was comparatively safe. The victoria drove quickly along the Avenue de l'Alma, and across the bridge of the same name, past the Champs de Mars, across the Place des Invalides, and into the long, sober Rue de Grenelle; thence, by streets unknown to Amélie, to the square in front of St. Sulpice, and then into a labyrinth of narrow streets, which were as a new world to the adventurous maiden.

'I am not going to take you to the Boul Mich for breakfast,' said Armand; 'it is too glaring and public. I am going to show you one of the oldest students' haunts in Paris'—antiquity in Paris usually meaning something under half a century—'a place that was famous in the days of the Restoration, the Pantagruel.'

'What a queer name,' said Amélie, whose knowledge of even the nomenclature of old French literature was of the smallest.

The carriage stopped in front of a dingy-looking house in a dingy-looking street, and, for the first time in her life, Mademoiselle Jarzé was introduced to a popular *café*, a haunt of the student and the Bohemian. It was even a stranger scene than she had expected to behold.

The Pantagruel had changed curiously since those days when Louis-Philippe was at the beginning of his reign, and when Père Lemoine went thither to seek tidings of his lost daughter. It had been then a dingy and sufficiently common-place establishment, consisting of two large low-ceiled rooms opening one into the other, furnished with numerous small tables, and boasting in the outer apartment a pewter-covered counter, or bar, behind which the mistress of the house sat all day and through the greater part of the night, enthroned among many-coloured bottles and glasses, and with, perchance, a few bunches of cheap flowers, making a central point of vivid colour amidst the pervading dulness.

Now, as in those days, the floor of the Pantagruel was sunk below the level of the street, and one descended to it by a stone step; now, as in the past, the outward aspect of this place of entertainment was darksome and uninviting; but, heavens, what a change within!

The Pantagruel had caught the spirit of the times. That

passion for luxury and decorative art which was the leading note of the Empire had seized upon this students' *café*. The Pantagruel had caught the fever of romanticism, mediævalism, Victor-Hugo-ism. The Pantagruel had become a page out of the book of the good old times, a house in which Villon himself might have drunk deep out of a whistle-tankard and trolled his roundelays to an admiring circle, whose sword-hilts clinked in chorus to the poet's glad refrain. The Pantagruel had gone in for 'culture.'

The walls were rich in old tapestry, and older Rouen pottery. Brass chandeliers and Gothic lanterns hung from the heavily-bossed ceiling. Each room had its fine old carved oak mantelpiece—its floreated iron dogs, whilst in the corner reposed pikes and lances that seemed as if only just put aside by some deep-drinking warrior of the Middle Ages, steel-clad from head to heel.

The discordant notes in this mediæval interior were the mahogany tables and a piano in front of the counter; but this latter anachronism was pardoned for the sake of conviviality when the Bohemians of literature and art met in these halls at eventide to criticise and anathematise those rival runners who had outstripped them in the race of life. Here assembled the brigade of the threadbare coats and the shabby hats, the ragged regiment of culture and wit, the *Râtés*—the men who might have done so much better in this world if they had *not* been geniuses.

In the dim Rembrandt gloom of this strange scene, lighted only by stained-glass casements, Amélie gazed and wondered. She had expected shabbiness, squalor even; and, behold, she was in a chamber that might have been the banquet hall of one of the old prince-nobles of France, at Blois or Plessy les Tours. Never out of the Louvre or the Hôtel de Cluny had she seen such richness of decoration, such brass and iron work, or such quaint pottery.

It was happily an hour at which most of the students were engaged in their colleges and hospitals, and when very few of the *Râtés* were up, so Kératry and his companion had the mediæval refectory all to themselves. He chose a table in the embrasure of one of the painted windows, and placed Amélie with her back to the room, so that, had it been ever so full, that pretty little *frimousse chiffonnée* of hers would not have been revealed to the public save in taking her departure.

Armand ordered a bottle of champagne as an accompaniment to a delicate little *déjeûner*, which was served quickly and well, and which Amélie declared was even nicer than anything she had ever eaten at the Maison Dorée or the Café Riche, whither

she had been invited on occasion to some festive banquet before the opera, given by wealthy friends of her father—those good Samaritans of the upper classes who seemed sent into the world to spend their money upon feeding the hungry with dinners at two napoleons a head.

She protested at first against the creaming champagne, vowed she would take nothing but coffee, or chocolate, but relented on seeing the primrose-tinted wine breathe a cold dew upon the tall Flemish goblet, and owned that it was nice because it was so deliciously cool.

'You must help me with the bottle,' said Armand, 'or I shall have to drink it all myself, and then I shall sink unconscious under the table, and you will have to pay the bill.'

'That would be quite out of the question,' said Amélie, whose poor little purse was always empty. 'I should have to stay here in pledge.'

'You see your danger, so you had better do your duty.'

Amélie did her duty to the extent of one of those tall glasses of pale perfumed liquor, sipped daintily during the progress of the meal. It was a warm morning towards the close of June, and the iced champagne was not unpleasant. Kératry finished the bottle with ease. They dawdled a little over their wood strawberries and black coffee; the gentleman paid the bill, which the lady thought absurdly small; and then they strolled away from the Pantagruel. The victoria had been dismissed when they alighted.

'What a dear, quiet old place, this Pantagruel,' said Amélie.

'Very. Do you know, child, that in '32 this quiet old place was the headquarters of Socialism. The *émeute* of that year was half hatched here.'

Amélie's mind was not historical. She knew there had been a revolution and a good many heads cut off in '93. The fact had been made familiar to her in various novels and dramas. She knew there had been a disturbance called a *coup d'état*, and some unpleasantness, when she was in the nursery; but here her knowledge ceased.

They went into a long narrow street somewhere at the back of the Luxembourg—a street of malodorous gutters and shabby miscellaneous houses with hardly a window or a roof alike, the antipodes of the white uniformity, the classic monotone of that Haussmann-ised Paris which she knew so well, a street of wine-shops, and *gargotes*, and humble *crémeries*. It was in this evil-smelling region that the *teinturier* had his abode.

Kératry stopped at a narrow, dirty-looking door, and led the way into a dark passage with an atmosphere pervaded by the concentrated essence of stale cabbage, the reek of an everlasting

*pot-au-feu*, a soup-kettle that was always brewing, and which went down from father to son without solution of continuity, like a West-Indian pepper-pot that has been in the family for generations.

'What a horrid den!' cried Amélie, smothering her nostrils in a perfumed handkerchief.

The stairs were worse than the passage, and seemed endless.

Jean Nimporte lived on the floor just under the steep gabled roof; but to Amélie it appeared as if that fifth floor were the twentieth, and that they were ascending the Tower of Babel: all the more so because every voice she heard on her way, through doors ajar or bawling from the obscurity of the staircase, seemed to speak a different *patois*, or a different language.

'WHAT is this awful place?' she asked at last, breathless, panting, on the fifth story, where the landing, with its low smoke-blackened ceiling and one small window, was wrapped in perpetual gloom.

'*Un garni*,' answered her guide, coolly. 'I dare say it is a revelation to you. You would hardly conceive, out of your inner consciousness, what a cheap Parisian lodging-house could be like.'

'I could never imagine anything so dreadful,' said Amélie, with conviction.

'Ah, you would have to descend a good many lower circles before you reached the bottom of the pit. This is a *bourgeois* caravansera—the abode of the struggling, the decayed, the respectable. Wait till you see real squalor, real dirt, real misery. Here the graces of life may be wanting, but the decencies are still cared for—in some wise.'

'Not in the matter of odours,' protested Amélie, still protecting her nose; 'the smell of this staircase is positively sickening.'

'Ah, the atmosphere is always the first thing to suffer.'

'And you really come here—often—to see this person?' aid Amélie, wonderingly, as they waited at Jean Nimporte's door.

'As often as I want him. He has the pride of Lucifer, and won't come to me.'

A voice called, 'Come in,' and Kératry turned the handle of the door and entered, Amélie lingering in the background, half afraid to follow.

'Good morning, friend. I have brought a little cousin to see you. I suppose you have no objection?' Kératry began, cheerily.

'If the lady does not object to the hole I live in, I do not object to the lady,' answered the literary hack.

His voice was husky, like the voice of a man whose lungs

were injured by drink and tobacco; but his tone was the tone of a gentleman, and he rose, meerschaum in hand, to greet his visitors. He was haggard and thin, with lank fair hair streaked with gray, tangled beard, pale, cadaverous complexion, eyes round which care had dug deep hollows and painted purple shadows. He had once been handsome, or, at least, refined and interesting. His bony figure stooped a little, and was clad in a loose dressing-gown, which had once been fine, but which long service had reduced to the colour of a withered chestnut leaf that has lain for a week in the gutter. His hands were the best point about him; but their transparent pallor savoured too much of disease and death. Amélie, who had no acquaintances less prosperous than herself, shrank with a thrill of terror from this human shipwreck.

'I have brought you my last scenes,' said Kératry. 'You need not mind what you say before Mademoiselle. She knows I am indebted to your collaboration, though I don't tell the world so.'

'Why should you?' retorted the man who called himself Jean Nimporte. 'If your play could win Petrarch's laurel crown, I should not ask for a leaf from the garland. All I want is to live. I have not had an idea of my own here for the last seven years,' touching his pallid brow with pallid fingers; 'but I can straighten another man's weak sentences and set them on their legs. I can prune exuberances, and pluck up weeds in the garden of fancy. And, although I have forgotten how to smile, I know how to turn a speech that will set a theatre in a roar. Will you have a glass of *purée de pois?*'

He pointed to a bottle half full of greenish liquor, and on Kératry refusing, poured some of the stuff into a tumbler, which he filled with water.

'Isn't it rather early for *absinthe?*' asked his client.

'It is not too early to live, and I can't live without it,' answered Jean Nimporte.

He unrolled the manuscript, and, with bent brow and pen ready dipped in the ink, began to read. His decision and rapidity of mind were marvellous, though the hand that held the pen trembled like an aspen leaf. He erased, interlined, threw in a sentence here, a word there, slashed his ruthless pen across a whole page of dialogue, dotted in jokes as easily as another man might have put in commas. Amélie looked on open-mouthed, half indignant that her friend's work should be so roughly handled, yet impressed by this wild genius with the shaking hand and matted beard.

For nearly an hour Monsieur Nimporte worked at those concluding scenes of the new vaudeville, never relaxing the

intent frown upon his haggard brow, sipping his glass of *absinthe*, refilling his pipe with those shaky hands of his, yet working all the while. Now and again he made a radical alteration, put a husband into a cupboard to overhear a lover's declaration, brought a *soubrette* from behind a curtain at a crisis, played pitch and toss with a love-letter, manipulated the old, old machinery of the Palais Royal drama with all the dexterity of an adept.

'I really think the thing will do,' he said, as he approached the end. 'I am obliged to hurry along, for I have an appointment at two o'clock with a gentleman to whose Frederick I have the honour to play Voltaire.'

'A poet whose rhymes you retouch,' said Kératry.

'Retouch! Yes, and occasionally remake altogether, for love of the Muses. He pays me more than you do, and he had need, for the work is harder. I was a poet myself once, and the divine flame burned fiercely enough in those days; but it is dreary work now to get a spark out of the old embers—to order. I never could work to order, Monsieur de Kératry. I should be a rich man if my Pegasus would have run in harness.'

He blew a great cloud from his old *brûle-gueule*, and sat for a minute or so motionless, his hand lying idle on the manuscript, his eyes fixed and dreamy. So does the man look who sits amidst the wreckage of a life that might have been glorious, and glances backward along the path of folly, flower-strewn in some places, perhaps; but, ah! how much oftener thick set with briar and nettle.

'You expect a visitor here at two o'clock,' said Amélie, looking alarmed. 'Why did you not say so before? Pray let us go this instant,' she added, turning to Kératry, and standing up, parasol in hand. 'We may meet some one on that horrid staircase—some one whom we know.'

'Don't be frightened, child. Nobody in the Quartier Latin is likely to know you,' replied Armand, easily.

'And if an acquaintance did recognise you, Mademoiselle, what then?' asked Jean Nimporte, looking up at her with a mocking smile. 'Is it a crime to visit the literary hermit in his cell—with your cousin?'

'Pray come!' pleaded Amélie, whose audacity had evaporated during the enforced quietude of the last hour.

It had been dull work, sitting playing with the handle of her parasol, listlessly contemplative of the poet's shabby surroundings. The red tile floor; the wretched old sofa, meant for repose, but loaded with pamphlets, papers, books, clothes—the accumulated litter of months of slovenly existence; the window opening upon a vista of roofs and chimneys, with not a leaf or a

flower within sight; the distempered wall, blotched with damp, scrawled here and there with charcoal sketches in the style of Gavarni; the cobwebs in the corners of the ceiling—altogether a dismal scene for the contemplation of a young lady accustomed to gilded cornices and damask-draped windows, commanding a bright outlook of foliage and fountains. The excitement, the flavour of novelty in her escapade had all passed off like the bubbles upon the champagne at the Pantagruel, and she had leisure to repent of her folly, and to speculate as to what would happen to her if Madame Jarzé, by any accident should discover this freak of unchaperoned girlhood. It was not that there was any harm in the thing, but it was unusual, unallowed—an assertion of feminine liberty which might be tolerated in New York, but which would create a nine days' wonder in the Champs Elysées.

But the *teinturier's* pen was at work again, correcting the final couplets of the vaudeville, and Armand de Kératry was for the moment absorbed in watching that rapid pen as it played havoc with his verses.

She tapped his shoulder impatiently with her parasol. 'Pray, take me home,' she said; 'don't you hear that Monsieur expects a visitor? I would not be seen here by anybody for worlds!'

Too late. There was a tap at the door, left ajar on account of the sultry mid-day heat, and a languid voice complained:

'Your staircase is the most infected hole in all Paris, my friend. It surprises me that you escape a fever.'

'*Ciel!*' gasped Amélie, in a half whisper, recognising that fashionable drawl, the concentrated essence of superciliousness; 'it is Monsieur de Pontchartrain. He must not see me. He will tell papa—mamma—Hortense. Hide me for pity's sake!'

She looked about her wildly like a young hind at bay for one of those curtains, cupboards, inner apartments of any kind, which are so plentiful in all vaudevilles.

There was a recess in which the literary hack kept his wardrobe, a threadbare coat and an old, old paletot, with ragged silk lining—a remnant of the time when there were Gandins upon the earth, and when he was one of them; but no shred of drapery screened that recess. But in a corner of the room there was a ladder, which communicated with a loft above; and to this ladder Jean Nimporte pointed, grinning maliciously the while.

Amélie flew to the haven of refuge, and scrambled up the ladder almost as quickly as a gnome in a fairy drama at the Châtelet or the Porte St.-Martin. She knew not whither that old break-neck ladder would lead her; but she would have gone anywhere—on the open roof, among chimney pots and half-

starved cats, at peril of life and limb, to avoid Paul de Pontchartrain.

Armand followed her up the rickety ladder, and as they vanished from view Jean Nimporte crossed the room with a leisurely step, saying:

'A moment, my friend, and I am with you,' in a voice half drowned in a yawn as of a man just awakened.

'Were you asleep?' asked Paul, sharply, as he entered. 'Ah, I see; *absinthe* again, and at two o'clock in the day! Do you know that you are softening your brain a little more with every spoonful of that pernicious stuff?'

'What does it matter? When the work of ruin is accomplished, I shall have ceased to suffer. Why should a man try to preserve his thinking faculty when thought is all pain, when memory is only a camera that shows the photograph of a fatal past, when imagination cannot conjure up a gleam of light in the future?'

'That's not a bad idea—a man steeping himself in *absinthe* with the deliberate intention of blotting out his brain,' said the little poet, excitedly. 'You are a terrible *Réfractaire*, Valnois, but you really have first-rate ideas. Have you thrown off any suggestions for me lately?'

He drew his chair to the table, took off his gloves, and squared his elbows with a business-like air, little knowing that a pair of mischievous blue eyes were watching him from a hole in the ceiling in the shadow of the projecting chimney-brace.

'Yes; I have scribbled a few verses betwixt midnight and morning—bosh, no doubt, but they may do for *you*,' replied the *Réfractaire*, with a scornful accent.

'Good! Let us go over them together presently. And have you touched up those verses I brought you the other day? They were a little in the rough, perhaps, but full of strong ideas.'

'No. I tried hard; but those attempts of yours are really too bad. The versification is simply impossible; and for ideas—well, I found two. One verbatim from Heine; the other, a thinly-disguised theft from Baudelaire. I am very sorry, my dear Vicomte, but your own stuff really won't do. The Parisian public and the Parisian press will stand a great deal from a man of fashion with a sprig of nobility in his cap, but they won't stand such twaddle as yours.'

'You have at least the merit of candour,' said the Vicomte, deeply offended. 'If you had written the verses yourself, you would think better of them.'

'Perhaps. There never was a mongrel so ugly that the mother did not love him.'

'I wrung those lines out of my heart.'

'Then do not wring your heart any more. The game is not worth the candle. Let us be business-like, Vicomte. I tried to chop your lines into shape, to introduce an idea or two into that wilderness of words, but it was not to be done. If you want poetry, you must be content to get it ready-made, as you did your idyl of the carrion by the river, which you tell me is your chief success. Here are ballads and songs for you, *plein le dos*, amorous, blasphemous, despairing, communistic; not an idea worth speaking of in the whole batch, but enough of the swing and the melody of verse to make them pass current—as the work of a Pontchartrain.'

'I would rather we worked together on metal from my own mine,' said Paul, with dignity.

'My dear friend, your mine produces nothing but scoria. I tell you, I have spent dismal hours trying to lick this wretched twaddle of yours into shape. I will look at it no more. If you want to fill your new volume——'

'*Charniers et Sépulcres*,' said the Vicomte; 'my publisher wants the completion of my manuscript before the end of next week. The season for poetry is nearly over.'

'If you must publish, you had better give him these things of mine. You can read them before you make up your mind. They are the very lees in my cup of inspiration, yet they are not so bad but that I have read worse in the Magazines.'

He opened a ragged, rusty old blotting-book, once a costly thing in Russia leather, with gilded crest and monogram on the cover, and from a confusion of papers he picked out nine or ten loose sheets, which he handed across the table to Monsieur de Pontchartrain, who read them very slowly, commenting and questioning as he went along with the captious air of a man determined to find fault. Sometimes he demanded an explanation of sentences which he found obscure, sometimes he stopped to check off the feet of a line on his fingers.

'You have a trochee here where it ought to be an iambus,' he said. '*Mon Dieu, c'est terrible!* It flays one's ears.'

'My ear had an odd knack of being true in the old days,' said the hack, quietly. 'I would venture the price of the ballad that you are mistaken;' and thereupon he demonstrated that the Vicomte was altogether wrong.

The loft to which Amélie and her companion had fled was a place of dust and cobwebs, invalided furniture, mouldy straw, empty boxes, rusty birdcages, the jetsam and flotsam of a cheap lodging-house, and among all this rubbish three or four large cases of shabbily-bound books—pamphlets, magazines, plays, novels. It was the interior of a steep gable, and was not above

four feet high in the clear. Those two listeners had to squat in a crouching position on each side of the trap-door, a heavy beam close above their heads. Amélie knew that she was spoiling her pretty holland gown, perhaps massacring the berries in her dainty little hat, and assuredly making a wreck of gloves at nine francs a pair, and yet it was all she could do to keep herself from exploding into loud laughter. To hear the little fopling, the pretended genius, the sham Musset, the spurious Baudelaire, in whom her sister Hortense believed as in Divinity itself—to hear him buying his verses, bargaining and chafering, as he did presently, for ballads and odes, serenades and *fantaisies*, piece by piece; grudgingly agreeing to pay so many francs for this or that, cheapening the waters of Castaly, making light of the Muses: to hear all this was as good as the funniest play or the wildest opera bouffe in Paris, as the Belle Helêne, or the Grand Duchesse herself, with all the chic and audacity of Schneider at the apex of her fame—Schneider, aflame with diamonds, prancing before emperors and kings.

Amélie remembered the Vicomte's noble wrath that afternoon at Lady Constance Danetree's when she spoke of the literary *teinturier*. She remembered his vehement '*Cela ne se peut pas*,' the indignant stride of his little varnished boots up and down the room. '*Cela ne se peut pas*,' he had repeated, swelling with heroic scorn. And behold, those very poems which had made him the lion of small tea-parties, the pet of elderly young ladies, had been bought and paid for from this poor *meurt-de-faim* with the threadbare coat and ragged beard.

Armand and Amélie sat smiling at each other among the dust and the cobwebs, the moths and the mice of that dreadful old loft, afraid to stir lest they should crack their skulls against the thick old tie-beam; smiling across the gulf of the trap-door, through which came the thin voice of the Vicomte, acrid as cheap red wine, bargaining and disputing over Apollo's wares.

When the haggling was all over and the Vicomte had doled out his cash and departed, grumbling, with his verses in his pocket, those two listeners in the loft burst into a peal of laughter, long and loud, and a bitter laugh from the garreteer below came up through the trap and mingled with their mirth.

'Don't let us lose another moment,' said Amélie, as she came nimbly down the ladder. 'But, oh, what fun it has been! I would not have missed it for worlds!'

'Lucky that I am in the habit of using that loft as a library, or there would have been no ladder handy,' said Monsieur Nimporte. 'Yes, it is a curious aspect of literature, is it not,

when a man buys his verses as he would buy his boots? But the Vicomte makes a harder bargain with me than he would with his bootmaker.'

'Ah, but he pays you ready money,' said Kératry, laughing. 'That makes all the difference.'

'I shall dine to-night,' replied Jean Nimporte, rattling his cash in his pocket. 'Good-day, Mademoiselle. I am glad our transactions have amused you.'

'I only wish you had a better market for your verses, Monsieur,' answered Amélie, with a gracious curtsey. 'You seem to be clever enough to set up half a dozen fashionable poets.'

'I have learnt my trade, Mademoiselle, that is all.'

He went out to the landing with his guests, and bade them adieu with the grace of a Lauzun or a Richelieu.

'He is perfectly *distingué*, although his clothes and his room are more terrible than a nightmare,' said Amélie, as she tripped quickly down the greasy old staircase. 'And now, for pity's sake, get me a carriage of some kind as fast as you can, and tell the man to drive me to Lady Constance Danetree's, so that mamma and Hortense may find me there when they call at five o'clock. I shall tell Lady Constance my morning's adventures, and all about Monsieur Pontchartrain. How amused she will be. Poor Hortense, with her poet *pour rire!* If I were to tell *her* this secret now, she could let Pontchartrain know that she had found him out, and he would make her an offer of marriage within the next twenty-four hours out of sheer fright.'

'It would only be sisterly to try the experiment,' said Kératry, as they walked towards St. Sulpice looking for a *voiture de place*.

'I'll think about it,' replied Amélie. 'Hortense is a very undeserving object; but she certainly is my sister, and I suppose that constitutes a claim upon one's good nature.'

## CHAPTER XXXIII

### 'AND THE DAY SHALL BE DARK OVER THEM'

JEAN NIMPORTE, otherwise Hector de Valnois, sank back in his tattered old easy chair directly his visitors were gone, and refilled his little black pipe, which, next to the yellow-green liquid in his glass, was the consolation of his days. Between *absinthe* and tobacco he contrived to endure life, and to forget that he had been once a creature of lofty aspirings, that he had once dreamt of fame and the Academy. He lay back in his chair, gazing at the motes dancing in the sunshine, and smiled his cynical smile at the little scene which had just ended. Presently he took the Vicomte's money out of his pocket, and counted it in the hollow of his wasted hand. A few napoleons and a handful of francs—a shabby honorarium even for the lees of genius. But the verses which were good enough for Monsieur de Pontchartrain to publish under his own name and at his own risk would not have found a purchaser among the publishers of Paris, who had long ago closed their pockets against Hector's muse.

'My dear fellow, you had better go down to posterity as the author of *Mes Nuits Blanches*,' said Michel Levy, of the Librairie Nouvelle, the chief rendezvous of intellectual Paris. 'You will never again write anything as good.'

Poetry, therefore, had long ceased to count as a means of bread-winning; but there were long wakeful hours in the dreary dead of the night when Valnois found a transient relief in verse—when the unsuccessful man's rebellious anger against fate, the disappointed man's remorse for his own follies, the lonely man's sense of lovelessness and abandonment found their expression in wild revilings of Providence, or in the opium-eater's visions of an impossible Paradise; and these effusions, the safety-valve which kept the engine from explosion, were just good enough to sell to Paul de Pontchartrain, and fifty times better than the most laborious efforts of that aristocratic driveller.

'I shall dine to-night,' said Valnois, looking at his money; 'and I shall pay my last *trimestre* for this accursed den, so that I may be safe from being thrust out into the street for the next month or two. If Pâquerette were here, I would give her a new gown. Poor Pâquerette! Was I very brutal that day

when my brain was maddened with *absinthe* and my temples were throbbing with neuralgia? A man is not particularly choice in his language at such a time. I may have driven her away from me by cruel words, or she may have made up her mind to leave this life of semi-starvation in an attic. She may have flown to a warmer nest. Who knows? It is the common lot of alliances like ours to end so!'

He smoked and mused, and sipped his *absinthe*. He had replenished his glass often during the two interviews with *absinthe*, but not with water, so that the stuff he was drinking now was almost *absinthe* pure. It was much too early for him to show himself in the streets even in this free-and-easy students' quarter, where a good coat was not *de rigueur*. The summer sun was still in its glory, a sun in which his once black coat looked a grayish-green, and his haggard face more ghastly than that frayed and threadbare coat. No; he would wait till the friendly dusk, and then stroll to the Restaurant Lapérouse, on the Quai des Grands-Augustins, where he could dine sumptuously at moderate cost in a room facing the river.

He was tired after his two interviews, and fell asleep in his chair presently—a sleep which lasted long, lulled by the distant sounds of the city, undisturbed even by the bells of St. Sulpice ringing for vespers. His nights were wakeful and fevered, and it was only after mental exhaustion that he slept soundly.

It was growing dusk, when there came a tap at the door, which startled him into broad wakefulness. Before he could answer the summons, the handle was turned and a man entered.

There was enough of the yellow western light still shining through the open window to show the man's face as he stood within the doorway. It was the drink-soddened countenance of that man who stopped Ishmael in the street the night he left the meeting of the Cercle du Prolo, the man who called himself Dumont. Valnois started to his feet.

'You!' he exclaimed. 'Why, it is an age since you have been here, and I began to think you were dead.'

'Did you?' replied the other, coolly. 'What use would there have been in my coming here? I had nothing to tell you. I was poorer than you.'

'You seem to have mended your fortunes,' said Valnois, surveying his visitor from head to foot. 'I never remember seeing you in such a sound coat, or in boots so instinct with the primal grace of the bootmaker. May I ask what gold mine you have discovered in the gutters of Paris?'

'I have found the best substitute for a gold mine in the shape of a wealthy patron.'

'Indeed!' retorted the other, contemptuously; 'and what manner of man, and for what kind of motive, can be found to patronise Théodore de Valnois, *alias* Dumont?'

'I think there is only one true definition for the word patron—a rich man who wants to make use of a poor man,' answered Dumont; 'and just such a patron have I found in the person of an old friend of yours.'

'Friend! I have no friend.'

'Not now, I grant. But you had a friend once—a friend whose life you saved on the fatal fourth of December, and who ought to have been grateful to you. Yet I suppose it will be said you cancelled the obligation afterwards.'

'No fooling, cousin. You take yourself for a wit, and that is about the only original opinion I ever discovered in you. You have been sponging upon Pâquerette's husband. Is that what you mean?'

'I have been making myself useful to him. *That* is what I mean.'

'You have found Pâquerette?' exclaimed Hector, eagerly.

'No; I am looking for her, or for evidence of her death. That is my present profession, for which I draw a modest little income by way of expenses; and I am divided in my mind as to whether I shall keep her alive, and content myself with the occasional egg my golden goose lays for me, or whether I shall kill her and my golden goose at the same time for the sake of ready money.'

'You are talking enigmas.'

'Not very obscure ones, dear cousin. Ishmael wants to be sure that his wife is dead—no doubt with a view to taking a second wife. If I can show him the *acte de décès*, he will give me a small sum of money—small, very small—but a godsend for a man in my position. Now, what is to prevent me producing the *acte de décès?*'

'Nothing except the fact that Pâquerette is still living—at least, I hope so; and that forgery and falsification of official documents mean felony, and that felony—above all, a second felony—means a longer seclusion from society than I think you would care to enter upon at your time of life.'

'That is a stumbling-block, I grant, but one that ought not to prove insurmountable to a man who has lived his life—sixty-six years, my Hector, and nearly half-a-century of failure and danger, shifts and difficulties, disappointments and disguises. If such a career as that cannot make a man dexterous, what can? There have been false *actes de décès* before to-day; and there will be again until the art of forgery is exploded.'

'Difficult and dangerous!' said Valnois.

'Difficulty and danger are the atmosphere I have breathed ever since I was twenty!'

'You must take your own way in life though it has not led you into pleasant places hitherto. I have nothing to do with your schemes; I am not a forger, and I am not going to extort money from Pâquerette's husband.'

The man who called himself Dumont came over to the open window and lounged with his elbows on the window sill, looking across the dim perspective of gables and chimney-pots to the gilded dome of the Invalides, shining in the last rays of sunset.

'Poor little Pâquerette!' he said, gently; 'Pâquerette, with her lily face and pathetic eyes. I always liked her. There was always a soft spot in this tough old heart of mine for Pâquerette. I was sorry for her too, for her fate was sad, and you were not altogether kind to her.'

Hector started from the half-recumbent position which he had resumed a minute or so before, and put down his pipe suddenly with a hand made tremulous by anger. 'How dare you say that!' he exclaimed. 'I loved her, and was true to her. Our path was not strewn with roses. If there were thorns we trod upon them side by side. Why do you harp upon Pâquerette's name? You must have seen her lately; you must have discovered something.'

'I have not seen her since I saw her in this room more than three months ago,' answered the elder man; and then he turned from the window and faced Hector with a grave countenance. 'But I have discovered something.'

'What?'

'I have found out who Pâquerette is!'

'Who she is, poor child!' echoed Hector, sadly: 'not much mystery there, I should think. The child of poverty, the child of neglect, the drudge of a drunken grandfather and grandmother. What can there be to discover in such a lot?'

'Poor as she was, she had a father,' said Dumont.

'And it is about that father you have made your discovery?'

'Yes.'

'An interesting one? an aristocratic mystery, eh?' asked Hector, with his cynical air, refilling his pipe.

He thought his kinsman was trifling with him.

'Interesting to me,' answered the other, gravely. 'Pâquerette is my daughter.'

'Your daughter! You never told me that you had one,' said Hector.

'There are numerous episodes in my life which I have not told you. Perhaps this is the one of which I have least reason

to be ashamed; and yet I am not free from blame even here. Pâquerette is my daughter, the daughter of my youth, the child of my one true and pure love, the child of my wife.'

'Your wife! Another revelation!'

'You have heard how I came to Paris to study law, rich in academical honours, poor in purse. Your father, my father's first cousin, looked down upon our branch of the house. Your father was a landed gentleman in a small way, mine a doctor in a little country town. You have heard, no doubt, how I neglected my legal studies, was plucked in my examinations, went to the bad altogether, from the provincial and Philistine point of view. But you may not have heard that I was a great man in a certain set, and those the advanced Reds, Socialists of the most scarlet dye. I became a voice and a power among those men—lived anyhow, gambled a good deal, and was just lucky enough to keep my head above water. I drained the student's cup of pleasure to the dregs. There is not a *cabaret* or *café-concert* in this quarter of the town in which I have not wasted my nights; not a billiard-room that these feet of mine have not trodden. I had my flirtations too in those days with many a handsome *grisette;* but I never knew what love meant till a fair, pale face flashed past me in the twilight, and I turned to follow a graceful figure in a shabby gray gown. Ah, how shabby she was, how poor she looked, dear child; and yet such a gracious creature!'

'Was this Pâquerette's mother?'

'Yes; a girl working at a clear-starcher's not very far from this street; a modest, honest, shy young creature, who blushed and trembled at my voice. It was weeks before I could win her confidence. If—if I ever had the thought of betraying her—and God knows what infamy may have lurked in my mind at the first—her innocence, her girlish simplicity, her perfect faith disarmed me. We had not known each other many weeks before I was her slave. And was I—a Socialist, reddest among the Reds—I who believed in the perfect equality of men, who scouted the bondage of caste—was I to shrink from allying myself with a pure and lovely girl because her parents were working people? What had I to lose by a low marriage? What hope or prospect had I of a loftier alliance? I—the penniless scapegrace! What chance had I of marrying rank or money? I counted the cost, and found I should sacrifice nothing by marrying the girl I loved; and I married her one fine morning at the Mairie after having romanced to her a little overmuch, perhaps, poor child! about my father's noble blood and his château—a stuccoed box on the dusty outskirts of our town.'

'You married her! That was an honest act at least.'

'Yes; I had flashes of honest feeling in those days. I married my love one fine May morning; but I had no home except a garret to which I could take her, and I let her go on working at the laundry and living in her parent's wretched hole while I beat about for a way of supporting her and myself somehow or somewhere. Our stolen hours of happiness, our dances at the Pré Catalan, our little jaunts to the fairs about Paris, our rides in jolting old cuckoos were the sweetest hours of my youth. One wrong, and one only, I did my love in that beginning of our life. I made her swear to keep her marriage secret. I would not have Père and Mère Lemoine for father and mother-in-law. I meant to leave Paris as soon as I could scrape a little money together, and to settle at Lyons or some other large town for a few years, only returning to the capital when I could feel sure of having given the Lemoines the slip. If you knew the kind of gentry they were, you would not wonder at this prejudice on my part, ultra-Republican as I was.'

'Pâquerette has told me that they were dreadful people.'

'We had been married less than three months when my Jeanneton began to be unhappy at her laundry. She had been seen with me at the Pré Catalan, she had been seen with me at a fair at Saint-Cloud, seen walking with me in the streets of an evening; and scandal, the broad, gross scandal of the vulgar began to asperse her fair name. Hints and insinuations were flung at her—sneers and vulgar taunts, which to her were torture. So one day, after a night's run of luck at a gambling-house in the Palais Royal, I told her to be ready to leave Paris with me next morning at daybreak. We travelled southward through the bright days of autumn. Oh, happy days! oh, happy journey!—last glimpse of paradise that I ever saw on this earth! After that my career was all downhill. I was unlucky, idle, reckless; I had not the blessed faculty of continuous work. I could talk, I could write flashy articles for the Republican newspapers. I picked up a few louis honestly now and then. But I lacked the blessed gift of patience. I was a born gamester. When I had a chance, I trifled with it. And finally, within a year of my daughter's birth, my reckless folly landed me—where you know.'

'In the galleys. A bad hotel for a gentleman of good family.'

'Jeanneton struggled on while I was in that hell upon earth—worked for herself and her infant—starved sometimes—came to see me in my misery as often as the rigour of that devilish place allowed. This lasted for nearly a year; and then, for the first time, my poor love was missing when the appointed day and hour came round. She had come to me, ill or well, in fair or foul weather; and my heart turned cold when the allotted

hour came and passed without sign or token from her. Hell seemed blacker on that wretched day than it had ever seemed since I entered it.'

'She was dead, perhaps?'

'Dead! No; not yet. It was a ghastly story. It would take too long to tell you the details. Enough that I came by the knowledge of the facts by the aid of a priest, whose presence was the only gleam of light in that Inferno—even to me, the mocker at creeds and creed-makers. I came in time to know that my poor girl had fled in a panic from the wretched den in which she had lived for some months—had fled on foot from Toulon—because the scoundrel who owned the house had pursued her with infamous proposals, and when she shrank from him with indignant loathing, had conspired with some of the vilest inmates of his house to bring a charge of theft against her. The plot was shallow enough, her innocence obvious; but, in her helplessness and inexperience—weak, ill, penniless, friendless, my poor girl took fright. She saw herself in danger of being shut up in that place which she knew too well from my abhorrent description, from the glimpses she had had of my surroundings. She fled from Toulon with her child, on foot, panic-stricken at that false charge. This much, and no more, could I discover six years afterwards, when I was a free man—free as a man can be with the brand upon his shoulder, the taint of prison life infecting him, his yellow passport the herald of his disgrace in every town he enters. I was free; but I was a ruined man, and I was a heart-broken man into the bargain. The scoundrel who had conspired against Jeanneton had died an evil death, so I had not even the comfort of revenge. I left Toulon, hardened as only seven years of the chain can harden a man; hardened still more by the loss of that one creature I had honestly and fondly loved. I was never able to trace my poor Jeanneton's footsteps to her nameless grave. Perhaps I might have tried harder; but those from whom I heard her story told me that the stamp of death was on her when she left Toulon. She had not a week's life in her, they said.'

'And your child? You took no pains to learn her fate?' asked Hector.

'Why should I seek her, poor waif? Had I a home to give her, or even an honest name? If she had drifted to some abode of charity, so much the better; if she had gravitated towards the gutter, I had no power to rescue her. The infant had never fastened herself upon my heart as her mother had done. The woman I loved being gone, I was content the child should go with her. If I had found her, and could have sheltered her, she would have been not the less a grief and a pain to me,

recalling what I had lost. When I left Toulon I had done with human affection. I set my face towards Paris, went back into the jungle of the great city, to live upon my fellow-men—a beast of prey among other beasts of prey.'

'You are a strange being, my cousin.'

'I am what life has made me. Perhaps, if I had been born with a big rent-roll, I should have been the soul of honour.'

'And you say Pâquerette is your daughter? Are you sure of her identity, sure that there is no missing link in the chain?'

'I am sure. The first time I ever saw that girl's face, the night I met her with you on the steps of Tortoni's, it was as if I had seen a ghost. It was Jeanneton's face that flitted by me in the lamplight—a face from Hades. Later, as she altered with the fatigues and cares of her theatrical career, it was still Jeanneton's face—Jeanneton's face as I saw it last in the *bagne*. I had no suspicion of the truth. I thought of the likeness only as one of those accidental resemblances which are common enough in life. Had you, either of you, mentioned the Rue Sombreuil, or the name of Lemoine—had you told me that Pâquerette was a fatherless waif reared in that place, I should have been certain of the truth. But it was left for Pâquerette's husband to enlighten me as to her parentage.'

'And since you have known the tie that unites her to you you have hunted for her?'

'Everywhere. I told Ishmael that I had never been able to trace her beyond Valparaiso, and that I must go to Valparaiso to find the track. Need I say that I did not go so far as South America in search of the poor girl, whom I last saw in this room. I drew a nice little lump of money for my passage to and fro, and contrived to lie *perdu* in Paris while I cautiously prosecuted my quest for my missing daughter. I have not yet returned from Valparaiso, and I doubt if I shall return until I am furnished with the *acte de décès* from the authorities of that port.'

'Scamp and trickster to the last!'

'Can the leopard change his spots, or the Ethiopian his skin? or could you show me any way to earn my bread honestly if I wanted to begin life afresh? No, my cousin; there is deep significance in that old fable of Hercules and the two roads. A man makes his choice once in his life by which road he will travel; and, by Heaven, when once he has taken the wrong turning, there is no cross-cut that will get him back to the right road. I took the wrong turning nine-and-thirty years ago, when I squandered the little hoard my father had scraped together to pay for my legal education, and from that hour to

this every step I have travelled has been upon the downward road.'

'Do you think that Pâquerette is still living?' inquired Hector, gloomily. 'She had wretched health last winter. I have had many a miserable hour in the watches of the night picturing her alone, friendless, penniless, dying of some lingering malady.'

'Who knows? Paris is like a great forest. She might be living in the next street, and one would know nothing. I have put half a dozen advertisements, cautiously worded, in the likeliest newspapers; but she may not have seen them. I have employed a man who keeps a private inquiry office, and who has a knack of hunting down people where everybody else would fail; but as yet he has not found her, nor any trace of her. Meanwhile it seems a pity that I should not touch a lump of money for the *acte de décès*. She would be no worse off for being dead and buried—on paper; and it will be easy to resuscitate her later, and to explain that the document was a mistake.'

'Cheat Ishmael as much as you like, my cousin, on your own account; but bring none of your unholy gains this way. The coin would smell of brimstone,' answered Hector, with a weary air.

That name of Ishmael always gave him a thrill of pain. It reminded him of the past, when he had been the benefactor, and Ishmael the obliged, when he had been the superior, when hope still smiled upon his path, when life was still glad. And now Ishmael's name was a word of power in Paris; Ishmael had won the wealth which sweetens existence, which makes a man a ruler among his fellow-men.

And he, Ishmael's superior by education and opportunity, by the divine spark of poetic genius, where was he in the meridian of life?—a star that had burnt out, a mine that had given up all its precious metal—a mere husk of manhood, looking with tired eyes along a dismal road whose end is death and oblivion.

## CHAPTER XXXIV

### 'THE KINGDOMS OF NATIONS GATHERED TOGETHER'

THE world was four weeks older since that memorable sixth of June when Berezowski tried to cut short a life which was destined to end in after years by the handiwork of a bolder assassin. Berezowski, valiantly defended by Emmanuel Arago, had been condemned to imprisonment for life, and the Czar had gone back to St. Petersburg somewhat offended that a French jury had spared the life of his would-be assassin. The glory of the great show in the Champs de Mars was waning a little, at least to the jaded eye of the Parisian, who saw the great glittering temple every day if he pleased. There had been a plethora of kings and princes, sultans and potentates from far corners of the earth, and the distinctly-local mind of the Parisian was in a state of historical and geographical bewilderment. On the outward crust of things, that gathering of the nations was the crowning glory of the Imperial rule, the triumph of the peaceful arts—not forgetting a good deal of space in the show devoted to the exhibition of the latest developments, improvements, and inventions in the art of slaughter. It was a reign of peace—peace without honour, as some fractious and bellicose spirits protested. France had preserved her neutrality, and had lost her prestige. On one side she beheld a united Italy—unfriendly, ungrateful, suspicious; on the other, a mighty Germanic confederation which threatened her frontiers. The daring state-craft of Bismarck, strong in the triumph of Sadowa, had transformed the modest kingdom of Prussia into a many-headed monster, swollen with the overweening pride of victorious arms.

Seen by the stranger, Imperial France, as represented by this city of wide boulevards and many *cafés*, new theatres and new bridges, market-places such as no other city in Europe could show—judged by the splendour of brick and stone, glass and iron, the second Empire might be taken to be at the apex of its glory; but the diplomatists and the statesmen who came to see the show could look deeper into things than this outer husk of pseudo-classic boulevards and much expenditure in the building line. They knew that the glory of the Empire had grown old like a garment, and that her sun had gone down while it was yet day. The tragical end of that fond dream of an Imperial Mexico, the failure of the negotiations about Luxembourg, the

unfriendly attitude of Italy, the double-dealing of Prussia—all these were thorns in the pillow of him whose sombre face, aged by chronic malady, assumed the monarch's kindly smile as he returned the greeting of subject or of stranger. Ah, what a strange and fatal history was suggested by that bent head, that meditative and anxious brow, those features darkened by secret thought! A childhood saddened by exile; a youth of ambitious dreams and vague aspirations amid the mists of Lake Constance; anon the enthusiast's wild efforts to re-kindle the star of a banished dynasty; then ignominious failure and the weary education of captivity and exile. All the dazzle and splendour of a reign of unexampled prosperity had failed to obliterate those shadows of early care; and now the noontide of success had waned, and the shades were deepening as the pilgrim descended the hill. To the indifferent eye he was but little changed since the Empire was young — a trifle more bent, perhaps—a shade graver and grayer than in that brilliant noon of success and popularity, and that was all. But those who were about his person noted how from this time he sank into a deeper taciturnity than that of old, and isolated himself oftener amidst the clouds of his cigarette. He read little; he wrote no more. The Imperial dreamer was wrapped in his dream, and the dream was slowly darkening to the blackness of night.

It was the second of July, day distinguished above other days by the distribution of prizes at the Palace of Industry—a ceremonial to be presided over by the Emperor, who himself received a first prize for his workmen's dwellings. Never was this Empire of Yesterday more brilliantly supported by the princes and potentates of ancient days. England was here in the person of her *debonnaire* young prince, heir to that crown which had once claimed this wide France as an appanage. Yonder, in shining robes of purest white, came the Sultan, unconscious of that dark line of murder in his house of life, the Prince of Orange, the Duke of Cambridge, the Duke of Teck, the Crown Prince of Prussia, Humbert of Italy, Mohemmed-Effendi, Abdul-Hamid, princes, princesses, and princelings seemingly numberless as the starry host; and among them all the Empress Eugènie, fairest star in that splendid galaxy. A wonderful *cortége*, a procession of stars and garters, knighthoods of every order, saintly badges, eagles and crowns — a dazzling train, moving slowly, with stately footsteps, to the music of a triumphal hymn composed by Rossini in honour of this great occasion.

The Emperor's speech was full of that all-round congratulation and pious exultation which are the dominant notes in such

speeches. He felicitated himself and Paris upon having received all the princes and potentates of the civilised world, and the masses of the nations in their train. He bade his subjects take pride to themselves in having shown the peoples of the earth France in the zenith of her greatness, her prosperity, her freedom. Foreign nations must needs appreciate this great country, once so troubled, to-day laborious, calm, fertile in noble ideas, rich in genius, unspoiled by material prosperity. Despite the increase of wealth, despite the natural bent of civilised man to pleasure and luxury, the national fibre was ever ready to vibrate, the national heart to beat high to the call of honour. But that warlike impulse of noble souls need be no longer a cause of peril for the repose of the world. France was no longer the disturber of the nations.

The initiated were not deceived by Imperial rhetoric. *They* knew that the moment which the Emperor had chosen for the glorification of France and her institutions was the very moment when those institutions were on the verge of shipwreck. The hearts of her men and women were rotten at the core, debased by a life of dissipation and effeminate luxury; a society made up of *clinquant* and *pacotille;* a nation living beyond its means, and inciting other nations to a like foolishness; a society in which home-life was almost extinct, and religion no more than a fashionable formula, patronized by the wives and daughters, ignored by the husbands and fathers.

While the music of that triumphal hymn was reverberating along the roof of the Palace of Industry, which for to-day was softened by a white velarium spangled with golden stars; while the drums were beating and the pompous procession was moving with slow and stately tread under the sunlight was there no vision before the Emperor's eyes—nearer, more vivid than the flags and the eagles, the dazzle of splendid uniforms, the brilliant colouring of the patrician crowd, the trophies, and palm trees, and flowers? Was there no nearer vision of a brother Emperor, scion of an Imperial house, a young man now lying in his bloody grave, the victim of an ambitious dreamer's fatal error? The news of Maximilian's death was fresh in the Emperor's mind on that July afternoon. He had received the despatch that told him his *protegé's* doom in that very building just before he made his speech. Yes, it was there before him, the bloody vision of his ghastliest failure—the foredoomed Mexican expedition. The young Emperor, with his handful of troops, helpless in beleaguered and famished Queretaro; the attempted flight in the dim dawn of a summer morning; and then, flight proving hopeless, the white flag, and the piteous appeal to Escobedo: 'Let me go under escort to any port you please, from whence I

may embark for Europe. I swear to you on my honour never again to set foot in Mexico.'

Never again! Alas! poor scion of the Hapsburghs: not so easily does the fatal trap into which thy foolish footsteps have been lured unlock its iron jaws. There have been evil deeds done in thy name in this land of extinct volcanos. These men are bloodthirsty in their triumph, and no plea from Republican America yonder, no prayers of thine own friends, nor the heroic advocacy of thy counsel, can save thee. Bravely dost thou go to thy untimely death in the pale June morning, while that far-off Paris, which sent thee to thy doom, is all a-flutter with the flags of her festival.

Bazaine was at Nancy, keeping quiet. At his landing at Havre he had been received without honour—indeed, with all the signs and tokens of disgrace. But already the Imperial displeasure was lessened. There had been no court-martial, no impeachment, no day of reckoning. That was to come later for master and servant.

Lady Constance Danetree was among the fashionable crowd at this Imperial function. However little one may care for such spectacles, one must assist at them, or society will ask, 'Why not?' and it is sometimes more troublesome to explain an omission than to make the sacrifice of inclination which society requires. Lady Constance had been going everywhere of late. She had her box for the Tuesdays at the Français; she was seen at the Opera, at the little theatres, at every race-meeting near Paris. She seemed to have a thirst for amusement, to be hurrying hither and thither in quest of excitement.

'I thought you cared very little about these things,' her friend, Lady Valentine, said to her one night at a great festival at the Opera. 'You used to laugh at my love of pleasure, and to wonder that I, who am nearly twenty years your senior, could live so much in society. I told you that as you grew older you would want more amusement. But that time has not come yet.'

'One must go with the herd,' answered Constance, listlessly.

'But you never used to go with the herd,' remonstrated Lady Valentine; 'that was your great charm. You were not afraid to think for yourself. I am sure that this feverish life does not suit you. You are looking pale and worn, haggard almost. You will lose your beauty if you are not careful.'

'I am not going to be careful for the sake of that unknown quantity which you are pleased to call my beauty' answered Constance, laughing. 'One must enjoy one's life.'

'Ah, but you don't look as if you were enjoying life. You don't look happy.'

Lady Valentine took upon herself all the privileges of an old

friend, and was eminently troublesome. Other people were not so familiar with Constance Danetree's character, and to that outer circle she seemed a radiant creature, full of enjoyment in a very enjoyable world, gifted with all charms and blessings that can make life worth living. She went everywhere, was seen everywhere, in that merry month of June—theatres, operas, balls, races, concerts, dinners, afternoon gatherings of all kinds. Wherever the *élite* of Paris were to be found, Constance Danetree was sure to be among them. But go where she would, she never met the great contractor, the man of bridges, and markets, and viaducts, and railways. Not once since that afternoon of June the sixth had she looked upon the face of Ishmael. Nor did she hear his name often in society, for, although he was reverenced for his success, and the wealth that had followed success, he was not a man of the world in society's acceptation of the word. He did not spend his money as a man should who wishes to stand well with society. He lived in an old-world corner of Paris, and entertained only his few and particular friends. He bought neither pictures nor statues; he collected neither rare plate, nor old books. His figure was unknown in the Hôtel Drouot. He was nobody's patron in the world of art. He had no château in the country, no shooting parties, or wild boar hunts. He kept no stud, had won no distinction upon the turf, which was just then the ultra-fashionable amusement alike for aristocrat and plutocrat. By those who knew very little about him he was set down as a churl and a miser—a man who chose to live apart and gloat over his money-bags rather than to float gaily along that brisk current of pleasure and dissipation which was so merrily drifting young France one knew not whither.

Those who knew him well knew that he was one of the foremost philanthropists of France, that his purse had helped and his brain had guided some of the noblest schemes for the welfare of men, women, and children which the modern science of charity had devised. His purse did not open at every call. He was not a prey to the charlatan brood who make benevolence a trade, the letter-writers and red-tapists, the theorists and fussy-philanthropists. He had founded a benevolent institution of considerable importance, which he maintained at his own cost, governing and administering it in person, upon his own system. This was a refuge and school for indigent boys and girls very much upon the plan of the admirable institutions founded later by Monsieur Bonjean, noble son of a heroic father, and by the good Abbé Roussel for boys only. The home was in the country, in a village beyond Marly, and hither he sent the friendless little waifs whom his agents gathered up like

fallen leaves out of Parisian gutters to be purified and re-created amidst green fields and flowers, woods and running streams. There were no happier hours of the millionaire's life than those which he spent among these rescued children, watching them at work in the quaint old gardens, or at their studies in the grave old house, which had been a monastery before the revolution of Ninety-three, and which, being left remote from railroads and in a state of decay, had been bought for about a fourth of its value.

At the children's home Ishmael was known as Monsieur Chose, and it was only his most intimate friends who knew him as the author of this good work. His interest in, and his labours for, this large institution occupied all his intervals of leisure in this summer of Sixty-seven; and he had refused all invitations save for those public banquets at which his presence was a professional necessity. He had only been two or three times at the Exhibition, and on each occasion he had gone only to do the honours of the show to some distinguished foreigner in his own line of life—a Nasmyth, a Peto, or a Cunard.

Thus the month had passed, and he and Constance Danetree had never met. She had gone everywhere, trying to forget him, despising herself because of that weakness of her woman's heart which made forgetfulness impossible. She had tried to drown thought and memory in the wine of pleasure; but the wine tasted of dust and ashes, and memory remained unaltered.

The evening of July the second was to be distinguished by a grand ball at a noble old house in the Faubourg Saint-Germain. It was a ball that had been talked of incessantly in Lady Constance Danetree's circle for the last three weeks. The giver of the entertainment was the Baroness Clavaroche, a lady whose husband had been until a year ago a staunch Legitimist, but who, soon after the death of his mother—an ancient dame distinguished for the severity of her morals, the dignity of her manners, and the rancour of her hatred for the race of Bonaparte—had astonished all Parisian society by suddenly turning his coat and accepting an important office at the Imperial Court. Like all converts, the Baron was intense in his enthusiasm for his new creed, swore by the Emperor in this twilight of his glory as if it had been still broad noon, was a passionate advocate of the Imperial policy in the Chamber and out of it—out Rouher-ing Rouher himself, the 'second Emperor,' in the boldness of his partisanship.

The Baroness Clavaroche, who was about fifteen years her husband's junior, and who loved gaiety and expenditure, considered it her bounden duty to give a festivity of some kind in honour of the Imperial idea. She had sent out cards for a ball

which, according to the tongues of rumour, was to surpass in splendour all private entertainments of this splendid year. Everybody who was noble, or rich, or famous, or beautiful had been invited to the festival, and not to have been asked meant social ostracism. Madame Clavaroche and Lady Constance met in the fashionable crowd at the Palace of Industry on the morning of the second, the Baroness radiant with delight at the success of her ball, which was already an assured fact, for in society success begins with the voice of rumour and the excitement of anticipation. A ball not talked about immensely beforehand would be a predoomed failure.

'Everybody is coming,' exclaimed Madame Clavaroche; 'everybody. I could count the few refusals on my fingers, and those are all from people who are too ill to move.'

'Have you asked Monsieur Ishmael, who came after the Emperor, and took first prize for workmen's houses,' inquired Constance, carelessly, 'among your numerous notorieties?'

'Yes, I asked Monsieur Ishmael. He is a great favourite of mine—so earnest, so original, such a contrast to our *petits crevés*. I did not forget him. But I am sorry to say he is one of my few refusals.'

'What! Is *he* too ill to move?'

'No, but he tells me he is not going out anywhere this season. He has some great work in hand—a railway in the South somewhere, between Nîmes and the Pyrenees, a stupendous affair, all viaduct and tunnel. He is too busy to go to balls. But we shall have plenty of notabilities for you—the Siamese Princes, the Cham of Tartary, the brother of the Tycoon. I am told the brother of the Tycoon is a most fascinating person—not handsome, you know, according to our European idea, but a most interesting type. Be sure you come early.'

'If I do, I shall not stay late,' answered Constance. 'I find that I am growing old, and soon grow tired of lights and music.'

'That is all nonsense. You must come early and stay late. I want beauty to be a conspicuous element in my rooms. What is the use of providing a background of flowers, and fountains, and electric light if the living foreground is to be made up of ugliness? Tell me about your costume. Who made it?'

'You had better ask who is making it. Perhaps it is not yet begun. You know what these people are. I went to the new man, who made the gowns for the last comedy at the Gymnase?'

'You were very wise. The new man has a taste, an instinct altogether *hors ligne*. Spricht is trading on a past reputation; he has emptied his bag. That pink satin and silver gown

Pierson wore in the second act of "*Contagion*" was a marvel. And it was such a brilliant idea to return to the sheen and shimmer of satin after the dreary reign of lustreless silks. *I* am going to wear satin to-night,' added the Baroness, with an air.

She was a stout woman, fair, with frizzy hair, and always overdressed; for, despite the universal prejudice in favour of Parisian taste, there are women in Paris who sin upon the side of superabundant finery.

'If you want to know what you ought *not* to wear,' said Mr. Spricht, the great *couturier*, to one of his favourite clients, privileged to enjoy the dear man's confidence, 'you have only to look at the Baroness Clavaroche.'

'But surely *you* make all her gowns?' exclaimed the customer. 'I have heard her say so.'

'I make her gowns, Madame, but I did not make her figure. You would not expect me to waste refined art upon a woman who has no more shape than a pincushion. Madame Clavaroche comes here, and I sell her my most expensive stuffs, and my people make them into gowns, and load them with the costliest *garniture;* and the result is, the Baroness Clavaroche as you see her. I have nothing to do with it; I would not soil my fingers by touching a yard of lace in such a cause. I do not lead a forlorn hope.'

'Then, unless one has a decent figure and a little natural grace, there is no use in coming to you,' murmured the customer, meekly, full of reverence for the great man.

'It would be wiser in such a case to keep your money in your pocket. It was the Marquise de Bar-le-duc who persuaded me to undertake Madame Clavaroche, and to oblige that sweet Marquise, who was at that time *du dernier bien* with an exalted personage, who shall be nameless, I would do a great deal. If the Baroness had been amenable to reason and good advice, I might have taken some interest in her, in spite of her figure. I might even have succeeded in making her look well. But the Baroness thinks herself a fine woman, and has ideas of her own—two insuperable difficulties. I allow her to wear what she likes; she pays me forty thousand francs a year; and, as I said before, the result is—the Baroness Clavaroche.'

In spite of this startling condemnation from the highest authority, the Baroness Clavaroche was the fashion, and helped to lead the fashions in that brilliant Paris of 1867. In those days beauty and grace were not essential elements in a woman of fashion—a grain of wit and a bushel of audacity were rather the indispensable qualifications for that distinguished *rôle*. Was it not said by one of the most accomplished courtiers of that epoch concerning quite the most charming woman of the

Imperial *entourage* that she was two-thirds lorette and one-third great lady? If this could be said of the great leader of the *beau-monde*, be sure all the little leaders followed in the same track.

The mansion of the Clavaroche family was one of the oldest houses in the Faubourg St.-Germain. It was situated in one of the quiet old streets of the faubourg, behind those magnificent modern buildings on the quays, the official residences of ministers and ambassadors, the villas of Jewish millionaires and new nobility. There was a suggestion of the past in every gable and chimney in the exterior view, in every cornice and doorway within. For more than a century and a half the good old house had remained unaltered from its original splendour of the Louis Quatorze period. It had begun to be old-fashioned in the days of the Regency, and was positively *rococo* under Louis Quinze.

During the first Empire and throughout the reign of Louis Philippe the Clavaroches dwelt apart. They led a life of absolute seclusion in the midst of the great busy city, received only a few old friends of the most strictly Legitimist opinions, gave themselves up to devotion which touched the boundary line of bigotry, were altogether pious, dull and narrow-minded, refusing to believe in the virtues of the good Citizen-King, or to gladden his Court by the light of their countenances. They grew old and gray in the old gray house amidst mouldering draperies, and faded tapestries, and tarnished gilding—relics of the past, which to the Clavaroche mind were in themselves a patent of aristocracy: curtains which had screened their great-great-grandmothers, arm-chairs in which Princes and Cardinals of the great King's Court had sat, looking-glasses which had reflected the vanished beauty of La Vallière and Montespan.

Baron Clavaroche lived up to the mature age of forty under the maternal wing, sharing all the opinions and cherishing all the prejudices of *ma mère*, whose hand he kissed in his stately fashion whenever he gave her his morning greeting; but shortly after his fortieth birthday, and about three years ago, the Baron, during a visit to the little town of Vichy with his invalid parent, had the happy fortune to win the good graces of a wealthy financier's daughter—a young lady of the new school, and an ardent Bonapartist. The marriage renewed the fortunes of the house of Clavaroche, which had subsided to a dead level of mediocrity; but it broke the old Baroness's heart. After enjoying the privilege of domineering over her son's habits, opinions, and actions for the last forty years, it seemed a hard thing to have the sceptre of maternal authority, the dignity of her position as mistress of that grave old house in the faubourg, the administration of her son's slender fortune, which she had nursed and

managed with a discretion worthy of an old financier, to have all the power and glory of her life snatched from her grasp by a plump and somewhat vulgar young woman of five-and-twenty, who had been brought up on American principles by a doting and indulgent father, who had been allowed to spend money like water, and who had been flattered by the young fortune-hunters of the period until she fancied herself irresistible.

Perhaps the chief reason of Mademoiselle Bourley's appreciation of the Baron's merits was the fact that he, among all her acquaintance, had treated her as a common mortal, and had never stooped to flatter her. The good old name of Clavaroche, the odour of sanctity which hung round these families of the old rock—these things were also an attraction: and Elise Bourley had only been acquainted with Théodore Clavaroche three weeks when she signified to her adoring father that she had at last seen a man whom she could condescend to marry.

'The others about whom you teased me were all detestable,' she said, 'but the Baron Clavaroche is at least a gentleman; and if he is stupid, that will be so much the better for me, as I intend to be mistress in my own house.'

The matter was easily arranged, the bride being one of the richest heiresses in Paris, and the bridegroom having long looked towards marriage as a break in the monotony of his life. A week after the beginning of the Paris winter season Baron Clavaroche and Mademoiselle Bourley were married at the Madeleine. The service was performed at midnight, a magnificent function, at which all fashionable Paris assisted.

The Dowager Baroness was an old woman when this blow fell upon her, and her health had been failing for some time; but she had stood up like a tower against the encroachments of age: she had held her own in her narrow circle against all comers; her voice was as loud, her frown as awful, her hatred of existing institutions as rancorous, her abuse of those in power—notably of the good and fair Empress—as vehement as it had been in the early days of the Citizen-King: but after her son's marriage, she gave way all at once, the tower was sapped at its base, the walls began to crumble, the hour of ruin and downfall was near at hand. On the eve of her son's wedding she made him swear that he would be true to the elder branch of the House of Bourbon as long as she lived.

'When I am in my grave, you can do what you like,' she said; 'I shall not be there to know of your treason, and in Purgatory I shall have enough to do to bear the burden of my own sins without feeling the weight of yours.'

The new Baroness chafed against the old order of things from the very beginning of her wedded life. She longed to sweep

away the old furniture, the faded tapestries, the tarnished gilding. It was in vain that her husband urged that the things she despised were precious as objects of art. She replied that the Empress could tolerate nothing that was not strictly in the style of Marie Antoinette; and that these ornate and ponderous old cabinets, and sofas, and gigantic arm-chairs of the seventeenth century were detestable, these sienna marble slabs and brazen arabesques the very lowest form of art.

'Do not disturb the old house while my mother inhabits it,' he pleaded. 'She will not trouble us long.'

Élise grumbled a little. There was no knowing how long an old woman might spin out the thread of life; and while the Dowager dawdled and lingered over those closing scenes youth was hurrying past for the young Baroness, pleasures hastening by her untasted, while she languished in that dusty old house, and was allowed to receive no one except a few Legitimists who were a quarter of a century behind the times, and still regretted Charles the Tenth. She was panting to call in the great upholsterers of the day, to send all those ponderous grandeurs of the past to the auction room, to be sold *en bloc* with all their associations included—aye, even the chair in which Turgot had sat, the table upon which the Duc de Richelieu had played *lansquenet* with Cardinals and Princes of the blood Royal. She was pining to redecorate and refurnish that historic mansion, to awaken the sleeping echoes with the sound of fiddles and cornets, to set the light airy feet of the Empire dancing in those stately halls that had seen the revels of an older dynasty. She was languishing to let the gay and garish light of the present in upon the dim shadows of the past, to disperse the ghosts and bring the living, breathing, moving Vanity Fair of new Paris about and around her.

'You might as well have taken me to live in a tomb,' she exclaimed, pettishly, to her husband, whose aristocratic face and dignified bearing might adorn, but certainly did not enliven, her existence. 'Indeed, it is much gayer in the funeral chapel of the great Emperor yonder,' with a jerk of her head towards the Invalides, 'for *there* people are always coming and going. Here there is no one. At dusk, after the house is shut up for the night, I can *hear* the silence in the hall and on the staircase.'

Baron Clavaroche admitted that the house was rather *triste:* it was a quality of fine old houses to be *triste;* and it was a rare privilege to enjoy in the heart of Paris the seclusion of a *château* in Normandy.

'I hate *châteaux* in Normandy, or anywhere else,' exclaimed Elise; 'and I would rather have an apartment in the Champs Élysées, or in the Faubourg Saint-Honoré, than this house of

yours, which has missed its vocation, since it ought certainly to be a convent for Carmelite sisters who wear nothing but woollen, and are rung up at three o'clock in the morning to say their prayers.'

'There can be nothing changed so long as my mother lives,' the Baron answered, gravely.

He had given a promise, and he meant to keep it at whatever inconvenience to himself. The rich young wife chafed her plumage against her prison bars, complained that there was no use in buying fine gowns when there was no one to see her wear them, but wore the gowns all the same, and was as fine as a parrot in a cage.

But the day came when the gay colours had to be put away for a while, and when the young Baroness had to attire herself in that severe and dense black raiment which makes French mourning such a terrible ordeal to the vain and the frivolous. The last sands had run out in the glass, and the stately funeral car, with its violet velvet canopy, its plumes and silver scutcheons, had come to carry the old Baroness to her last resting-place in the vault below a particularly hideous Egyptian tomb in gray granite on the ridge of the hill among the limes and chestnuts of Père Lachaise; and the young Baroness reigned in her stead.

The young Baroness had to endure a long and weary year of mourning, on which Baron Clavaroche insisted as a sacred debt due to the manes of the departed Dowager, not one hour of which was to be remitted; and then the old house in the old faubourg awakened to life and bustle, and movement and expenditure—in a day, in an hour, with the opening of a door and the entrance of a crowd of workmen. The Baroness had planned everything with architect and upholsterers beforehand, and the process of transformation from the old to the new began with the stroke of the clock that told the last hour of that year of mourning. The Baron gave in his allegiance to the Emperor, a friend in high quarters having brought about the *rapprochement* of these two great men; and as soon as her house was ready, the Baroness opened her doors wide to that strange mixed world of the second Empire, a world in which many were beautiful, brilliant, distinguished, brave, clever, while some were even honest and loyal, but in which there were more scamps, *roues*, tricksters and charlatans than had ever been seen in the front rank of society since the days of Philip the Regent, who is said to have invented that word *roué* for the benefit of his own particular friends. 'They were mostly creatures worthy of being broken on the wheel,' said the Prince. The friends, for their part, affirmed that the *sobriquet* was an honourable one,

implying the last degree of loyalty and devotion, and only signified that they were ready to be so broken in the service of their Royal master.

The Baron was not a genius, and he did not carry over to the Imperial side of the Senate the weight of a great political reputation; but his name was a power in itself, he voted as he was told to vote, and he spoke as he was told to speak; and in those stormy debates of Sixty-seven—debates upon the Mexican question, debates upon the Luxembourg treaty, when the language and the bearing of French senators surpassed in dramatic vehemence and bluster the most vehement and blusterous of demagogues or Home Rulers, Baron Clavaroche was useful were it only as a dead weight.

And now, to do honour to the newest development of the Empire, the Baroness Clavaroche opened her doors to receive all fashionable Paris at a *fête* more splendid than had ever been given by a private individual within the memory of the oldest inhabitant of that ancient faubourg, whose highly respectable inhabitants had a knack of living to a green old age.

The ball was to be a costume ball, and costume balls were not so common in those days as they are now. In those brilliant seasons that followed the marriage of the Emperor—in the day of Crimean victories, of Solferino and Magenta—period of triumph, and glory, and unclouded sunshine—the balls given by Prime Ministers and Imperial favourites had been of an ideal splendour. The costumes and groupings, the historical quadrilles, the quadrilles of the nations, of the four seasons, the constellations, shepherds and shepherdesses after Watteau, the four sons of Aymon—these had been moving pictures of a brilliancy and a beauty to haunt the memory of man. Ah! what stars of beauty had shone upon those nights of fashion and folly. Castiglione, in the audacious triumph of sensuous loveliness, in her costume of Queen of Hearts, braving opinion, confronting society, secure in the dominion of transcendent charms; Gréville, Walewska, each supreme after her fashion, and intent on outshining the glory of her rivals. The Emperor and Empress had loved to assist in these festivities. They had entered and vanished mysteriously, as in a kind of fairyland, by secret doors communicating with the Tuileries. They had changed their costumes three or four times during the long night of revelry; but the Emperor's slow and sidelong walk, or his habit of pulling the drooping ends of his moustache, was apt to betray him in spite of disguises. Grave senators, famous lawyers had not disdained to take part in these assemblies discreetly attired in short Venetian mantles of velvet or satin, which scarcely concealed the regulation evening dress beneath.

The fever for this spectacular form of entertainment had waned, like all other society fevers, after a time, and there had not been any remarkable ball of this kind for the last two or three years. The Baroness Claveroche took upon herself to revive the taste. Her ball was to be a fancy ball, a mask ball, a ball of dominos, and strange disguises, and mystifications. Masks were not to be removed till supper, a tremendous banquet, which was to be given in a temporary pavilion at the end of the garden, large enough to seat five hundred people, lighted by electricity, and said to cost twenty thousand francs—an erection which was to be carted away during to-morrow's daylight, and to vanish almost as swiftly as a scene in a fairy spectacle at the Porte Saint-Martin, leaving only a big bill behind.

The dancing room had been Madame Clavaroche's especial care. Her ball was to be a ball of roses as well as of historic and fanciful costumes. She had reproduced that exquisite arrangement of the *salle des glaces* at Versailles which had been the admiration of Parisian society in Fifty-five, when the great ball was given in honour of the Queen of England. Garlands of roses were suspended from the ceiling, crossing and recrossing each other in fantastic profusion, and from the rose garlands seemed to hang the crystal chandeliers. The mirrors were framed in roses, the doorways were festooned with roses, the orchestra was divided into four alcoves, or gilded cages, which filled the corners of the room, and the trellises which half concealed the musicians were wreathed with roses. It seemed as if all the rose-gardens of the South could hardly have furnished so many flowers.

## CHAPTER XXXV

### 'AND THE FIRSTBORN OF THE POOR SHALL FEED'

On that second of July—while Parisian society and all the pleasure-seekers from foreign lands were crowded into the Palace of Industry, where twenty thousand privileged spectators were seated around the Imperial throne, high on its daïs of crimson velvet powdered with golden bees, amidst foliage and flowers, and gigantic trophies of industry and art—Ishmael was enjoying a long quiet morning in the gardens of the old monastery beyond Marly-le-Roi, beautiful exceedingly in the full flush of their midsummer glory, thousands of roses abloom in the old-fashioned parterres, magnolia trees weighed down by their heavy waxen chalices breathing perfume, vivid masses of golden broom shining against a background of darkest foliage, long vistas of greenery, at the end of which sparkled far-off flashes of blue water. It seemed the home of poet or dreamer rather than of practical engineer, contractor, speculator in waste lands, millionaire.

Yet it is a fact that a man whose daily work is of a dry-as-dust order has often a fonder love of the country than your poet and dreamer, and Ishmael found in these gardens and groves of the old Benedictine monastery relief and refreshment after his Parisian life which seemed to renew his youth with every fresh visit. There was a deep, sweet pleasure, not untouched by sadness, in watching these joyous bands of children—childhood without a care—since these little waifs, gathered from the slum and the gutter while thought and memory were still dim, knew not of any world outside these gardens, or the country walks on which they were taken at rare intervals for a treat. Of that foul world of Paris, the lanes and hovels of Ménilmontant and Villette, of Clichy and Montmartre, from which they had been rescued, they thought, if they ever thought of it at all, as a bad dream which had troubled their babyhood. This life here among leaves and flowers, and songs of birds, and blue sky, in spacious dormitories where the little white beds were purity personified, in lofty playrooms where there were all the simple toys and games that can develop the grace and strength of healthy childhood and awaken the mental powers with the mystifications and puzzles that are the delight of children—this was the reality. That troubled and gloomy past, time of dark rooms

and loathsome odours, mud, squalor, blows, hunger, was the dream.

It was noon, and Ishmael walked, book in hand, in one of those long leafy glades, a grassy walk between old Spanish chestnuts and flowering limes, with here and there a spreading oak that was supposed to have been planted in the time of King Dagobert. The book was a grave book, and needed to be read in supreme quiet ; and at this hour there was not a sound in those groves and gardens except an occasional bird-call and the hum of summer insects. Truly a quiet family these seven hundred and fifty children of the great contractor. But when, in his pacing up and down, Ishmael came to the upper end of the alley, which was only divided by a wide sweep of sunlit greensward from the great gray Gothic pile yonder with its widely-opened windows, there fell upon his ear a sound as of the rolling of far distant waves, or the hum of Brobdignagian beetles—something vague, tremendous, almost awful, like the sound of nations furiously raging together heard from afar.

This distant tumult was made by the voices of the children at their dinner hour, accompanied by the rattle of busy knives and forks, the clatter of plates and dishes in rapid circulation. In almost all other schools and institutions in France the children dined in a solemn silence, and were made to understand that it was an offence to break the dumbness. Ishmael's children were allowed to talk as much as they liked, and they ate all their meals in a Babel of young voices, for Ishmael had been told that it was good for children to talk and laugh as they sat at table ; and as his chief desire was not for order and quietude, but for the health and growth of his little ones, he allowed full freedom of speech. The children were not allowed to talk with full mouths : that offence against decency was put down with a high hand by the gray-robed sisters who walked briskly up and down, serving and watching behind the long rows of diners. The children were so happy and so free, that they took a pride in obeying their teachers, and there was an *esprit de corps* and a loyalty among these rescued ones which might put to shame many a famous public school.

Presently, instantaneously, as it were, and with a great shrill chorus of shouting, indistinct, joyous as the songs of birds, the children came pouring out upon the great green lawn, almost golden under the vertical sun—troops of girls in pink and white cotton—just such cotton as Pâquerette wore that day at Vincennes when she and Ishmael met for the first time—a serpentine band of girls running, flying almost, making swiftest and most wonderful curves over the velvet turf—dark hair, fair hair

waving in the summer breeze, and a chorus of laughter and joyous snatches of speech to make glad the heart of man—three hundred girl-children let loose suddenly into loveliest gardens after a morning's easy lessons and a good dinner. Could there be happiness upon this earth more perfect? Childhood that knows not care; childhood that never heard of want or debt; childhood with an army of playfellows amidst a paradise of trees and flowers, and with no stern rules and regulations, and dictations and counter-dictations, and theories and counter-theories of an incompetent committee to turn the paradise into a prison.

This was what Ishmael had done for Pâquerette's sake—for the sake of the wife who had abandoned him, blighted his life, and almost broken his heart. He had at first designed a home for boys only, having discovered that in France philanthropy had done much more for the succour and protection of the weaker sex than of the stronger; but, on becoming owner of the spacious rambling old monastery, with ample space around for adding to its accommodation at his pleasure, he determined upon creating a home and a school for girls, who were to be admitted as infants, and who were not to leave till they were old enough and wise enough to enter upon the arena of life, fortified by a sound and useful education, and by the robust health which is the natural result of a well-fed, well-cared-for childhood. It was the recollection of Pâquerette's dismal girlhood in that stony well in the Rue Sombreuil which prompted Ishmael to this extension of his original plan. Are not those pallid faces of girls and children in the back slums of a great city an everlasting appeal to the rich?—just as the hungry faces and gaunt figures in the streets at Christmas-time seem to reproach the men and women in velvet and fur going home to roast turkey and plum-pudding that have become a burden and a weariness of spirit by sheer satiety. Ishmael could not forget that ground-floor den in the faubourg on a level with all the squalor and foulness of the yard, damp with the slime of ages. And there were many such yards in Paris; and in a city of late years given over to the madness of strong drink there must needs be many such neglected children as Pâquerette.

It was such children as these that Ishmael and his agents collected and brought home to the paradise at Marly. It was home verily, for they had known no other, and they could know no happier on this side of Heaven.

The serpentine train of children stopped its evolutions all in a moment, the pink cotton frocks, dark hair and golden hair, tumbling over one another in a sudden confusion, and from those rosy lips there came a cry of shriller joy than had been

heard before. The little girls had descried that tall figure in the leafy alley, the grave handsome face, and dark kind eyes watching them.

It was their patron and friend, Monsieur Chose. They all came tearing across the grass to meet him, a veritable Niagara of children. They clapped their hands, they shouted, they stamped their feet. 'Monsieur Chose! Monsieur Chose! Monsieur Chose!' they cried in their shrillest treble, and this was their idea of a polite greeting.

Rarely was Monsieur Chose seen on this side of the old monastic grounds. He spent many a morning with the boys, teaching them, drilling them, giving them easy lectures on mechanics, taking them for long pilgrimages to the woods of Marly, where he taught them more natural history in an hour than they could learn in a month from their books. With the boys he was a familiar friend; but here his presence was an event. With the girls he ranked as a demigod. They, who knew nothing of Greek gods and heroes, had a vague and dim idea that this man was something above common humanity, and that it was no sin to worship him.

'Well, little ones,' he said kindly, patting a golden head at his knee and smiling across the broad ranks of eager faces, most of them open-mouthed and grinning; 'you seem pleased to see me.'

But they only repeated, 'Monsieur Chose! Monsieur Chose! Monsieur Chose!' stamping their feet for accompaniment.

It was the rude eloquence of the masses, and Ishmael understood its meaning perfectly.

'What do you want me to do for you, my children?' he asked, seeing himself blockaded by a circle of childish heads, a circle that was momently becoming thicker and extending wider as the three hundred assumed this fresh formation. 'Am I to play one of your games with you—*Colin Maillard, par exemple?*'

There was a pause of silence, an evident hesitation, as if one impulse moved all those young minds, yet none of those young lips dared utter it. And then a tiny voice close to Ishmael's knee lisped:

'Tell us a story, Monsieur Chose.'

Whereupon followed shrillest of choruses, 'A story, a story, a story, Monsieur Chose! "Cendrillon," "The White Cat," "Fortunio,"' the whole round of Perrault and Madame d'Aulnoy, each child naming her favourite legend.

On certain memorable occasions Ishmael had told these children some of the old fairy tales, a treat never to be forgotten.

He looked at his watch.

'Do you know that I want to go back to Paris by an early train?' he said.

They did not know, and they did not care a straw. They worshipped him, but his convenience was of not the slightest consequence to them. They only repeated, 'Please tell us a story, Monsieur Chose!' 'Don't go back to Paris, Monsieur Chose!' '"The White Cat," please, Monsieur Chose!' '"The Little Red Hood," please, Monsieur Chose!' with infinite variations.

'It would be hard to refuse you, my little ones,' he said, and he crossed the lawn, followed and surrounded by the infantine herd, till he came to a rustic bench under a fine old cedar. Here he seated himself, and the children all sat down on the grass at his feet That tiny fair-haired child of two and a half—she who had been the first to give utterance to the wish of all the others—clambered on to the bench and nestled against his arm with her pale gold curls almost in his waistcoat. She had no respect of persons this baby waif from one of the Communistic quarters of Paris.

Ishmael told them the story of the little girl in the red hood who was on the verge of being eaten by a wolf. He took care to effect her rescue at the crisis lest infantile slumbers should be haunted by that direful tragedy. That wolf in the story, told close upon bed-time by loving mothers or good-natured nurses, has been the author of many a bad dream under baby brows. Better far the tale of "Cendrillon," with its happy ending, its poetical justice; better "The Sleeping Beauty," "The White Cat," better anything than those two visions of horror—"Bluebeard" and "Red-Riding-Hood."

The bell ringing for vespers at four o'clock warned Ishmael that he had wasted hours among these babies. Those long legs of his would have to stride their fastest to reach the distant station by six. He kept no carriage or saddle-horse at the Home; only a couple of springless carts and a pair of sturdy *percherons* to fetch provisions from Versailles or Marly.

It was seven o'clock when he reached the great city, half-past seven when he entered the Place Royale, whose leafy dulness was in no wise affected by the commotion at the other end of Paris. The sober old arcades in front of the houses, unchanged since the days of Louis the Thirteenth, when the rank and fashion of Paris lived here, looked as solemn as a cloister in the summer evening. The limes and chestnuts cast their dark shadows on the ground, so rarely trodden by hurrying footsteps, paced in leisurely fashion by the grave and the contemplative. Here Richelieu lived, and here Marion de Lorme. One of those fine red houses is sacred as having been once the home of Victor

Hugo. In another dwelt for awhile that meteoric genius Rachel. She sleeps not very far from her old home, in the Jewish quarter at Père Lachaise.

A man who had been pacing from fountain to fountain with a weary air for the last half-hour descried Ishmael as he turned the corner of the Place, and came out into the road quickly to meet him. It was Théodore de Valnois, otherwise Dumont.

'I have some news for you,' he said.

'What! you have returned from Valparaiso, then?—always supposing you have been there.'

'Polite!' muttered Dumont. 'Did I not write to you from that place?'

'I got sundry letters from you with the Valparaiso postmark,' answered Ishmael, scanning him coolly; 'but as you asked for your money to be sent to a friend in the Boulevard St. Michel—in order, as you said, that it should be forwarded to you by a securer medium than the post—I confess to having had my doubts as to the reality of your voyage to Chili.'

'Fatal tendency in the mind of the rich man always to think evil of his poorer brother,' said Dumont, with a sinister sparkle in his almond-shaped eyes, contemplating his employer furtively between half-closed lids, an evil light lurking in the midst of a network of wrinkles like a spider in the middle of his web. 'Fortunately for me, Monsieur Ishmael, my honour and honesty in this little transaction are not dependent upon my own unsupported testimony. I have the evidence of a sailor on board the packet that brought me back to France, and that sailor is the man from whom I have obtained the very information in search of which I went to Valparaiso, and for which you offered me a certain and a very moderate price.'

Ishmael paled, and his breath grew shorter as he looked at the man searchingly, suspiciously, in the clear, soft light of the summer evening, the sun sloping westward above the spires and domes of aristocratic Paris.

'You have heard something—definite—about my wife?' he said, his voice husky with emotion, which even his strong will could not master. So much—his fate, the history of his life in the days to come—depended upon the nature of the news which this man was to give him.

'Yes.'

'Living—or dead?'

'Dead.'

'You have brought back documentary evidence—the *acte de décès?*'

'No; but I have got you living evidence in the person of a

sailor who was on board the vessel on which Madame Ishmael died, who saw her remains thrown into the sea.'

'She died at sea?'

'Yes.'

'Alone?'

'Alone.'

'He had deserted her, then, that scoundrel!' muttered Ishmael; 'the villain who took a base advantage of her child-like nature—turned to guilt and shame a creature that Heaven designed for innocence—a soul without one impure instinct.'

They were walking slowly side by side under the old arcade in front of Ishmael's door. There was no one about to mark their countenances, or to overhear their speech; nor was there anything in the tone or look of either man to startle a passer-by. Life and death can be so spoken of with lowered voices, with grave faces.

'If you want to know the whole truth about Madame Ishmael's death, you had better go with me to this Spanish sailor's lodging, and hear the story from his lips. The man is a rascal, I daresay: most of these fellows are rascals. They are not reared, or educated, or treated in a way to breed angels. But he can have no motive for lying about this matter, no motive for deceiving you.'

'How do I know that?' asked Ishmael.

'There goes the rich man's suspicion again. "Has he not *you* at his back?" you say within yourself. "You who are poverty personified, and therefore a past-master of treachery. *You* may have bribed him, you may have taught him—*you*, Laurent Dumont, whom I employ because it suits my purpose, but whom I suspect at every turn!" That is the kind of thing lurking in your thoughts, no doubt.'

'Something like that, perhaps. However, I will see this Spanish sailor of yours. There can be no harm in that.'

'None. And you can judge for yourself; you can make your own conclusions from what you hear and see.'

'Be sure I shall do that. Am I to understand that you found out nothing for yourself at Valparaiso, and that your sole discovery was made on the voyage home, from this sailor?'

'It almost comes to that. I saw the proprietor of the café-concert at which your wife sang—a Frenchman, and civil enough. He remembered Madame Ishmael perfectly, though not by that name. She was Mademoiselle Bonita at his establishment. He praised her beauty, her *chic*, her bird-like voice. He told me that her health broke down after three or four months in a tropical climate, and she was obliged to leave off singing. She left the city soon after in a ship, the name of

which he remembered chiefly because she was a wretched Chilian tub which seldom carried passengers, and because he himself had tried to prevent Mademoiselle Bonita sailing in her. But the poor soul was in a feverish hurry to get back to France. She was alone—friendless—with very little money, and she caught at the first chance of a cheap voyage. She was to pay the captain of this merchant vessel about a third of the passenger-rate by one of the first-class steamers.'

'He had abandoned her, then—left her to her fate in a strange city. Did your café-concert keeper tell you about *him?*'

'No; he seemed to know very little, and I did not care to ask leading questions for her sake.'

'That was discreet. But it shall be my duty to find him even at the eleventh hour. If she is dead, so much the more reason for retribution. No, he shall not escape my just wrath, not even at the last. Go on with your story.'

'The Chilian ship in which your wife sailed was a barque carrying copper, and called the "Loro." She was bound for Havre, and to Havre I took my passage by steamer, hoping at Havre to be able to take up the broken thread. Madame Ishmael was very ill when she left Valparaiso. There might be some official connected with the harbour at Havre who would remember the landing of a pretty young woman—an invalid and alone—from a ship which carried only two or three passengers. But before I was half-way across the sea, I had discovered all that remained to be told about your wife's fate. Leaning over the taffrail one moonlit night, smoking and listening to the talk of a group of sailors clustered round one of their mates who had been on the sick list for some time, I heard the mention of a ship called the "Loro." This was enough to put me on the scent. It was the invalid sailor who named that ship. I took an early opportunity of questioning him, and from him I heard the story of your wife's last voyage and her grave in the sea. I need tell you no more. You had better hear the details at first hand from the sailor himself. He is in Paris, where I brought him. He has not many days' life in him, and if his deposition be worth anything, you had better get it without delay. You can have it from his own lips.'

'Yes, that will be best. I can see him this evening, you say?'

'At once if you will come with me.'

'I must dine first. I will meet you later. Where does the man live?'

'Not in a very pleasant neighbourhood; but as your business with him is a matter of importance, you will not mind that. If I had had my own way, I should have taken him to the hospital;

but he had an old chum in Paris, and insisted on going to share his den. He lodges in the Cité Jeanne d'Arc, by the Barrière d'Italie. But you might have some difficulty in finding the room if you went there without a guide, so, if you name your hour, I will meet you at *le Chat Blanc*, in the Avenue des Gobelins. The Cité Jeanne d'Arc is within a quarter of an hour's walk.'

Ishmael looked at his watch.

'I will be there at half-past eight,' he said.

'That gives you only three-quarters of an hour in all,' answered Dumont; 'not much time for dinner.'

'My dinner will be a speedy business. *Au revoir.*'

He dismissed his agent with a nod, and turned towards his own door. But Dumont was not inclined to leave him without one more question.

He followed his patron to the doorstep, and laid his hand upon Ishmael's sleeve.

'If I prove the fact of your wife's death to your satisfaction by means of this Spaniard's deposition, you will not withhold the reward you promised?' he asked.

Ishmael turned upon him indignantly.

'Am I the kind of man to break my word?' he asked.

'No, no; of course not,' answered the other, 'for you can afford to keep it. Honour and honesty are luxuries which rich men need not deny themselves.'

Ishmael shut his door, and Dumont strolled away towards the Rue Saint-Antoine, thoughtful, anxious even, yet feeling that up to this point things were going smoothlyfor him.

'It has been a troublesome business,' he told himself, 'and will be difficult to carry neatly through to the finish, for this Ishmael is no fool. But it is easier and safer than a forged *acte de décès*. My kinsman is right. It is not a pleasant thing to go back to the *bagne*. I had enough of that free gymnasium thirty years ago. It hardened my muscles and braced my limbs; but it planted a worm in the core of my heart, a worm that has never died, and never will while that heart beats—the inexorable hatred of my fellow-men.'

Ishmael's dinner was the briefest business, for he was too much disturbed in mind to take more than a crust of bread and a tumbler of wine. His real motive in postponing his visit to the Cité Jeanne d'Arc was the desire to arm himself with a small American revolver before entering a neighbourhood which was, perhaps, more familiar to him than to Dumont. In the course of his long labours in the cause of the working population of Paris he had taken pains to inspect all the principal settle-

ments of poverty within the fortifications ; and this Cité Jeanne d'Arc he knew to be one of the very worst, a standing disgrace and dishonour to a civilised country, more hideous and revolting in its filth and squalor than the vilest concatenation of reeded hovels ever inhabited by sweltering blackamoors in an African swamp, or the foulest village street in Turkey or Persia. He had inspected the Cité Jeanne d'Arc, and had protested against its horrors in the public papers ; he had taken its construction and its architecture, its ventilation, drainage, and water supply as an admirable example of what ought not to be permitted in any pig-stye or cattle-shed : how much less in any human dwelling ! He had lifted up his voice in high places against this terrible instance of man's inhumanity to man ; but there are vested interests in Paris as well as in London, and the Cité Jeanne d'Arc, with its fifteen hundred apartments, giving shelter to fifteen hundred different families, still cumbered the ground yonder on the southward side of Paris.

What infamy, what treason might not be reasonably expected in such a place? A brave man is never foolhardy. Ishmael had a little revolver which he kept expressly—like an old hat or a pair of strong boots—for explorations in doubtful neighbourhoods, and he wore it in a fashion of his own. He attached the pistol to a leather strap fastened round his wrist, and carried it snugly concealed up the sleeve of his coat. In the moment of danger his weapon was in his hand in a moment, ready for action. There was no fumbling in breast or in pocket, no movement which could be stopped or anticipated by the foe. In a breath the pistol slid into its place, and his finger was on the trigger ready to fire.

He drove to the Avenue des Gobelins, odorous of tanners' yards and workshops, and stopped at a somewhat disreputable looking café-restaurant, on the pavement in front of which there was a colony of small iron tables. Dumont was seated at one of them with the regulation *carafon* of brandy and a syphon of *eau de seltz* at his elbow.

He paid the waiter, and was ready to accompany Ishmael in a minute. The summer dusk was deepening, the sky was crimson behind the great white archway and the gilded dome, the fountains and statues far away to the west. The lamps were lighted in the shabby cafés and shops round about as Ishmael and his companion walked across a region of waste places and scattered houses which has since undergone considerable alteration to the Cité Jeanne d'Arc.

'You seem to know the way,' said Dumont.

'There are very few of the slums of Paris in which I do not know my way,' answered Ishmael.

'Ah, I remember. You have gone in for the amelioration of

the workman's surroundings, the elevation of his mind by means of whitewash and spring water. You have found it hard work, I'm afraid.'

'I have found it very hard work. Unhappily, the initial difficulty lies with the workman himself. He has, for the most part, a hereditary love of dirt, the fault of bad legislation and dishonest landlords, who have left him to wallow in the mire from generation to generation until the mire has become his natural element. He has another fault, which is a rooted disinclination to do anything on his own part for the improvement of his surroundings were it so much as to knock in a nail, or sweep down a cobweb. He looks to the landlord for everything; and as, in a general way, the landlord does nothing, the result is—such a place as this.'

They were on the threshold of the Cité Jeanne d'Arc. They stood with a momentary hesitation at the end of a shallow canal of mud, once a paved way, but from which the paving-stones had long been rooted up, and which was now a channel where the inhabitants flung their refuse of all kinds, where the housewife emptied her pail, and the laundress her tub. On either side this dismal gulf stood a pile of building, gray, gloomy, prison-like in the midsummer twilight, rising stage above stage, blank, and flat, and monotonous in form, to the slated roof—a dead wall as of a jail, pierced with windows of the same unornamental pattern, windows in which shattered panes, straw, and newspapers were the rule.

Through the mud and filth of this canal Ishmael waded after his guide to a door half-way down the alley. Here Dumont entered, and led the way up a staircase provided with the usual rope instead of a banister rail. On every story there was a narrow passage, entirely without light or ventilation, leading to the different apartments, in each of which a family was lodged. In some cases panels had been knocked out of the doors, or had dropped out from sheer rottenness and decay. In many windows glass was entirely absent, other casements were immovable in their frames by reason of the broken condition of the iron fastenings. Health, cleanliness, decency were alike impossible in such dwelling-places; but had these huge caravansari been planned in the first instance as a hotbed for vice and crime, for discontent and revolution, the arrangements could not have been better adapted for the purpose in view.

The two men mounted slowly, cautiously, groping their way up the dilapidated stairs to the fourth story, and then, still groping along the narrow passage, to a door at the end, which Dumont opened without ceremony.

The window, with almost every pane shattered, faced the west, and the last gleams of the sunset showed red athwart the rotten framework, through which came the first untainted air that Ishmael had breathed since he entered the barrack. Against the wall stood an iron bedstead, upon which a man was lying, dressed in shirt and trousers, with bare brown feet showing beyond the piece of sacking which served as a coverlet, and with a sailor's scarlet cap upon his raven black hair—a Spaniard, evidently. So far Dumont had spoken the truth.

There was another man in the room, seated at a table near the bed, playing some game at cards by himself, by the light of a single candle stuck in an old claret bottle. He, too, looked like a Spaniard and a sailor.

'Has he been any worse since I left you?' asked Dumont of this man.

'No worse; the same always. As weak as a baby, and drowsy, *tiene sueño, tiene muchisimo sueño.*'

'I must try to rouse him for a short time, at any rate,' said Dumont. 'You can go and smoke a cigar in the passage, *amigo*, while Monsieur talks to your mate. It will not be long.'

He offered his case to the Spaniard, whose dirty claw-like fingers snatched at a couple of trabucos greedily. Not often did such luxuries come his way, and he shuffled out to the dark, dirty corridor in supreme content.

'Fernando, awake!' said Dumont, taking hold of the sleeping sailor's shoulder and shaking him gently.

'Is it not rather dangerous to awaken a dying man?' asked Ishmael, looking intently at the Spaniard's statuesque face.

'He would sleep himself into the grave if we did not rouse him now and then to force food or drink upon him—a few spoonfuls of soup, or a little wine and water,' answered Dumont. 'There is no use standing upon *punctilio*. He cannot live long, and when he dies the secret of your wife's fate will die with him.'

'How is that?'

'Because he is the only survivor of the crew of the ship on board which she died.'

'The ship was wrecked, then?'

'Yes; and this was the only man saved.'

'What is the matter with him?'

'Heaven knows. General decay, perhaps. The doctor who sometimes visits this den has looked at him, shaken his head, and gone his way. Nothing to be done.'

He had been trying to rouse the sailor all through this conversation, and at last succeeded. The man lifted his heavy

eyelids, and looked with dim, dreamy eyes at the two faces bent over him. His own face was marble-white as the countenance of death itself, and almost expressionless.

'This is the husband of the young woman who died on board the "Loro,"' said Dumont. 'I want you to tell him the circumstances of her death, and what happened afterwards.'

The Spaniard stared vaguely like a man who cannot follow the drift of what he hears.

'Stay!' said Ishmael; 'before you question him further, it would be well to have another witness. Is there any one you can summon more respectable than that fellow who went out just now?'

Dumont shrugged his shoulders.

'In this aviary the birds are all of the hawk tribe,' he said.

'And do both these sailors understand French?'

'Both.'

'Then you had better call the friend back. You can take down the Spaniard's deposition, and his friend can witness it.'

'Good.'

He opened the door and called, 'Pedro! you are wanted;' and Pedro came strolling in with his first cigar half smoked. 'If Monsieur has no objection,' he said, and went on smoking, nodding his acquiescence when Dumont told him for what he was wanted.

There was considerable difficulty in rousing the dormant consciousness of the sick sailor; but at last, by repeating the words 'Loro,' shipwreck, Valparaiso, Dumont succeeded in penetrating the clouded brain: the dull eyes showed a faint gleam of intelligence, the blue lips moved slowly. 'On board the "Loro"—yes—there was a young woman—alone—very sad—a woman who sat in a corner of the deck all day, and wept often when she thought no one was looking. We had a bad passage, stormy and long, and when we had been at sea three weeks the young woman fell ill of a fever. There was only one other woman on board—the captain's wife—and she was sea-sick and frightened, and too ill to look after the girl who was down with fever. They found her dead in her berth one morning. She was a singer called La Bonita. She was thrown into the sea at sunset off Cape Horn. The captain made an entry in his log; but within three days we struck upon a rock near the Falklands, and ship, and log, and captain were all at the bottom of the sea four hours afterwards. I got off in one of the boats with the captain's wife and son, a poor little lad of nine, weak and sickly. We were out four days and nights before we were picked up by a French steamer bound for Buenos Ayres. The

captain's wife died before we got into port from the consequences of exposure to the sea and the weather, and the boy died in the hospital soon after.'

This story, told slowly, disjointedly, but still, plain enough in its facts, was listened to with grave and gloomy attention by Ishmael. He heard, but he heard with doubt and suspicion. Such a story was easily told. Such events have often happened —might have happened in this case just as the sailor had related them. A woman might have died of fever on board a ship called the 'Loro,' and none but this Spanish sailor might remain to tell her fate. But how could he, Ishmael, be sure that the woman who so died was his wife, Pâquerette? It was to Dumont's interest to trump up some plausible story in order to earn the promised reward.

'Are you convinced?' asked Dumont, presently, looking up from the sheet of paper on which he had written the sailor's statement, while Ishmael sat silent with bent brows.

'Not altogether. Granted that this man's story is true, how can I be sure that the woman who died on board the "Loro" was my wife?'

'Friend Fernando was curious enough to provide himself with a memorial of her existence, which may, perhaps, convince you,' answered Dumont. 'He felt keenly interested in that lonely passenger, and after her death he went into her cabin and possessed himself of the few poor treasures she had left—some trinkets of trifling value and a packet of letters. He had them hidden in his shirt at the time of the wreck. The trinkets he sold at Buenos Ayres, the letters he has under his pillow to-night. Would you like to see them?'

'Yes.'

Dumont groped under the wretched apology for a pillow, and produced a little packet of letters, which looked as if it had been steeped in sea water.

The writing was all blurred and blotted, but Ishmael knew that neat, small penmanship, that gilt coronet and cypher in the corner of the paper, only too well. Slowly and with darkening brow, he looked over the letters. They bore the date of the fatal year in his life—the year that had taken away his brothers and given him back his inheritance—the year that had robbed him of wife and of friend. They were the seducer's letters to his victim—Faust to Marguerite, Mephistopheles standing at his shoulder and guiding his pen.

Ishmael put the letters into his pocket, and took out a handful of gold, which he thrust into the Spaniard's clammy hand. The eyelids had sunk again upon the marble cheeks, and he was breathing heavily, slowly.

'It would have been only justice if I had killed that man, said Pâquerette's husband.

Dumont read over the statement, which the Spaniard Pedro signed as witness. Ishmael opened his pocket-book and counted out the promised reward in notes, which he handed to Dumont.

'You are satisfied?' asked the agent.

'Yes, I am satisfied. The story is sad and strange; but, after all, it is not incredible that she should die thus—abandoned and alone.'

He took up his hat to go.

'If this man is dying and the doctor can do no more for him, he ought at least to see a priest,' he said. 'I will send a good *curé* whom I know to talk to him.'

'I am afraid it will be wasted trouble for you and the *curé*,' answered Dumont, carelessly. 'My friend Fernando is a difficult subject when he is awake. But you must please yourself. Shall I go back to the Avenue des Gobelins with you?'

'There's no occasion: I can find my way.'

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## CHAPTER XXXVI

### 'FOR, LO! THE WINTER IS PAST'

It was nearly eleven o'clock. The lamps and Chinese lanterns of the festival in the Legitimist quarter made a glow of light above the roofs and dormers of the sombre old houses like the lurid glare of a conflagration, while on every gust of summer wind there floated the music of a military band softened by distance. The pavement in front of the Clavaroche mansion was crowded with idlers waiting to see the carriages drive in through the broad gateway—idlers who remarked audibly upon the costumes of the maskers, and tried to guess their identity. The Baroness Clavaroche, gorgeous in a gown of yellow satin and *point de Venise*, was stationed in the vestibule of her *salon* of roses, an octagon room lined with palms and tropical ferns, the rich bloom of cactus, Cape jasmine, and orange flowers, receiving her guests as they filed past her to the ball-room.

There were no announcements, mystification being the chief feature of the festival. The guests handed their cards of invitation to the groom of the chambers, who threw them into a gigantic Oriental bowl on a carved ebony stand, which stood near the chief entrance. The Baroness alone was unmasked.

But later in the evening, when the duty of receiving her guests was over, she too was to have her share in the general bewilderment, provided always that in sharp-eyed Paris there was a single mortal incapable of recognising that Flemish torso and the peculiar setting on of the fair Flemish head.

Baron Clavaroche, a fish very much out of water in the midst of the masked crowd, moved slowly to and fro among the throng in sober evening dress, over which, to satisfy his wife's fancy, he had consented to wear a small Venetian mantle of gold-embroidered brocade. He wore the Legion of Honour, with its eagle in diamonds, not long received from the Imperial hand; and as he circulated among his guests, masked among the crowd of other masks, he had the felicity of hearing himself, his wife, and his fortunes discussed in the free and easy way in which friends talk of each other under such circumstances. There is something in the very act of giving a grand entertainment which seems to put a man and woman out of court, as it were. Every one finds something to criticise, something to condemn, something to grumble about. There is nothing so good that it might not have been better; there are no arrangements so perfect as to be without a hitch somewhere; and then comes the chorus of complainings: 'Did you ever see anything so badly managed as the entrance for the carriages?' 'We waited at least an hour.' 'That avalanche of roses must have cost a fortune!' 'Nothing to people who make money by the wholesale ruin of their fellow-creatures, as old Bourley made his.' 'He was at the bottom of the Mexican loan.' 'Morny.' 'Jecker.' 'Highway robbery under a new name.' 'The Baron himself had not a sou.' 'Married him for the sake of his title.' 'The supper is to be in a marquee at the end of the garden, five minutes' walk.' 'Pleasant if the night should be wet.' 'Every sign of a thunderstorm.' 'Electric light sure to be a failure.' 'They narrowly escaped a *fiasco* at the ball at the Tuileries. Rather a daring experiment for Madame Clavaroche.' 'My dear, that woman's whole career is an experiment.'

These were the rags and scraps of conversation which greeted the master of the house as he moved restlessly from pillar to post, now gazing upward at the festoons of summer roses, the dazzling crystal chandeliers, the innumerable wax candles, thinking of what his mother would have suffered could she have seen the desecration of those noble old rooms, this riotous luxury, this wild expenditure on flowers, and candles, and decorations which would be swept away to the rubbish heap to-morrow—she who had counted every sou, yet who, at her poorest, had scrupulously set apart the tenth of her income for charity, and had often exceeded that amount at the cost of her own

comfort, nay, of almost the necessities of life. And withal, she had been cheerful, and had delighted in those gray, grave old rooms, and the few grave and gray old friends who occasionally assembled there.

He thought of those parties of the past to-night while the waltz of maskers swept past him like a mountain torrent, and the solid old oak floor seemed to rock under that rhythmical tread. He remembered the little knot of elderly men and women grouped in front of the old hearth yonder, now hidden behind a sloping bank of Provençe roses. He recalled the slow, measured speech, the political discussions, the prophecies of impending doom for this Imperial *simulacrum*, which seemed so fair and sound, and yet was hollow and rotten, and on the point of falling like a palace built out of a pack of cards. So, at least, the worthy adherents of Henri Cinq had gone on protesting for the last fifteen years. And now they were all dispersed, those shadows of the past; and the children of the Empire filled the room with their garish mirth, their turbulent pleasure.

They flew in circles past him, a whirlpool of colour and brightness, a phantasmagoria of strange figures—Watteau shepherdesses, Mexican post-boys, Turkish generals, Spanish bull-fighters, Swiss cowherds, Chinese mandarins, gipsies from wild strange lands between the Danube and the Baltic, *polichinelles*, *feu-follets*, *débardeurs*, postilions of Longjumeau, brigands, coolies, abbés, sweeps, skeletons, harlequins, misers, Jews, sailors, demons—all revolving, circulating, changing places like the chips of coloured glass in a kaleidoscope.

The Baron crept away from the ball-room in despair. He wandered through those lace-draped doorways under festoons of roses wondering where they had carried the good old panelled doors, whether perchance they had been carted off to be burned as something *demodé* in the way of architecture, and whether he was henceforth to live in a house without doors. No new change could surprise him after the changes that had already taken place. His wife's taste and his wife's money had so transformed the good old house, that there was not within its walls a single spot on which the Baron could rest the sole of his foot without having his old habits, his old associations outraged by the novelty of his surroundings. The violins and violoncellos, the flutes and hautboys sank into silence within their gilded cages, and that maelstrom of dancers and colours, gold and glitter, ceased its wild revolving. The dancers dispersed slowly in adjoining rooms, or in the garden, where the summer moon was shining on a smooth lawn, on flower beds and fountains, and on the great crimson and white marquee yonder, which was to open its doors at one o'clock precisely for supper.

'Do you know if Lady Constance Danetree is here?' asked a Watteau columbine of a Mexican post-boy, on whose arm she leant as they paced the velvet lawn.

'I have not seen her yet.'

'Do you think you would know her in a mask?'

'Do I think I should know Juno if I met her on the Boulevard? Lady Constance has a walk and an air that no man with an eye for beauty could possibly mistake.'

'You admire her very much,' said the columbine, with a faint sigh.

She was one of the prettiest little figures in the show, dressed all in white and pale gray, like a china figure in *biscuit* and *gris-de-flandres*, powdered wig, white shoes, white frock, white gloves, with touches of gray satin here and there, and a gray velvet bodice that fitted the plump, supple figure as the rind fits the peach.

The post-boy looked down at her with a mischievous smile playing round the corners of his moustachiod lips. The black velvet mask left the mouth uncovered.

'I think she is the handsomest woman in Paris,' he said; 'but not half so fascinating as a certain little woman I know, who has much less pretension to absolute beauty, but who is *pourrie de chic*.'

'She is very charming,' said the columbine, whose everyday name was Amélie Jarzé, relieved by this avowal; 'I am devoted to her. Is it not strange she does not marry?'

'*L'embarras du choix*,' answered the post-boy, otherwise Armand de Kératry. 'She might marry anyone, and so she marries no one.'

Armand and Amélie had been closer friends than ever since their adventure in the Quartier Latin. It is wonderful how a little escapade of that kind ripens friendship. There was a secret between them, which served as a link. They could not hear of the Vicomte's poetry without exchanging stolen glances, or hiding together in corners to laugh at their ease. The mere sight of the little man with his faultless gloves and boots, his mean little sallow face and intolerable airs, set Amélie and Armand in a mutual fever of fun. And after a fortnight of this stolen amusement, Armand de Kératry found out all at once that he had had enough of a bachelor's life in Paris; that the existence was as *banal* as it was costly; that it would be an absolute economy to marry; and that Amélie Jarzé, who had most of the faults and follies of her age and epoch, redeemed by good temper and high spirits, was the one young woman in all Paris whom he would like to marry.

His proposal was welcomed by Monsieur and Madame Jarzé, who had known him for years. He was not rich, but he had

enough for existence even in Paris; and he had expectations. Had there been any prospect of a higher bid for her younger daughter, Madame Jarzé's heart would have hardened itself to stone. But this being the best chance that had offered itself after three years of active enterprise in the husband-hunting line, Madame Jarzé melted into tears and drew the young man to her moiré antique bosom before he was aware.

'That child has always adored you,' she murmured.

'Do you really think so?' faltered Armand, who liked to imagine a tender little soul looking up to him with secret worship, watching for his smiles, living upon his kind words. 'Do you know I had an idea at one time that Amélie was very much taken by your wealthy friend, Monsieur Ishmael?'

'My dear Armand! How *could* you?' exclaimed his future mother-in-law, who was already speculating on the *corbeille*, and thinking of the letters *de faire part*. 'A man of at least seven and thirty—nearly old enough to be her father.'

Armand glanced at Monsieur Jarzé, gray, wrinkled, with a figure inclining to that of Punch, and thought there was a good deal of difference between the hypothetical parent and the real article.

The arrangement was ratified—the *dot* agreed. It would be a drain upon the paternal resources, and might involve an appeal to the private purse of the Emperor, a man of almost fabulous generosity to his dependents. But to see that cockle-shell barque, his younger daughter, moored in a safe haven, Monsieur Jarzé would have undertaken a task infinitely more difficult.

And now Amélie hung upon her lover's arm with the proud sense of proprietorship. She was no longer a *demoiselle à marier* with keen eye ever on the watch for the chance of the moment, the sudden opportunity to lead a worthy victim captive. She had secured her victim almost unawares, and he wore his chains as if he liked them. That light nature of hers was easily made happy. A month ago she had been miserable because Ishmael did not care for her. She had told herself that, in losing the chance of a magnificent establishment, she had also lost the one man of all others whom she could truly and fondly love. And now she told herself that the one man whom she had truly and fondly loved from the very dawn of girlhood was the man who was to be her husband, and that her romantic admiration of Ishmael had been a mere caprice, a girlish whim of no real significance.

To-night, assured that her costume was a success, she felt that there was nothing wanting in her cup of bliss. She would not be rich as Armand's wife, but she could be aristocratic. She would be Amélie de Kératry. That 'de' made amends for much. She had always hated the plebeian sound of Jarzé, *tout court*.

Not so happy was poor Hortense amidst the roses and the lights, the glitter and dazzle of the *fête*. Clad in a flowing robe of purest white, with classic sandals, a wreath of oak-leaves on her classic head, an oak bough in her hand, she represented a Grecian sibyl. It was a pretty dress in the abstract, and it became Hortense Jarzé's style of beauty; but it was not a good costume for a fancy ball. The short skirts and neat ankles, the columbines and Pierrottes, and *petits chaperons rouges*, and *bergères* and *débardeuses* had it all their own way in the dance; and as there were a good many wallflowers among the *petits crevés*, young-old men who vowed that they had given up dancing ages ago, the dancers could take their choice in the motley crowd of dames and damsels, all masked, and therefore all on equal terms as to beauty. It was form and pace that told at Madame Clavaroche's ball.

Vainly had Hortense sought her poet amidst the throng. That small, frail figure might well be lost in such a crowd. And the Vicomte had left his intentions doubtful—would not say whether he would or would not be present. He stigmatized the whole business as a folly—a mere parade and manifesto on the part of a vain, purse-proud woman, who wanted all Paris to talk about her and her house.

'No doubt she thinks I shall celebrate her ball in a poem,' he said; 'send her down to posterity as the giver of the prettiest fête of the epoch.'

'It would make a charming poem,' said Hortense; 'the crowd of strange costumes of all nations—the music, and flowers, and summer night—the mystery of masked faces. Do go to the ball if it were only for the sake of writing about it.'

The Vicomte mused for a moment, and then shook his head.

'It would not be worth the trouble,' he said. 'My muse is not inspired by *chiffons*.'

'But *chiffons* rule the world in our day,' argued Hortense, who knew the poet's thirst for renown. 'Granted that such a subject is beneath your pen, yet you must know that a poem of that kind, full of personalities, would set all Paris talking about the author.'

'It might,' mused Pontchartrain, twirling the pointed end of his moustache with those delicately tapering fingers. 'People always talk most about bagatelles. What a wonderful knowledge of the world you have, Mademoiselle Jarzé.'

'I have been obliged to endure my life in it for the last five years, she answered, wearily.

And now the sibyl was there, but had not as yet discovered her Apollo. It was some time after midnight when Lady

Constance Danetree's coupé drove under the porch. She had come very late, caring little about the festival, and anxious to avoid the block of carriages. She looked superb in a Venetian costume of dark red velvet, gold brocade, and black fur, a robe such as Titian or Moroni would have loved to paint. The ruff of old Italian point opened just wide enough to show the noble curve of the throat, and was clasped by a large square emerald of fabulous value set with black pearls. Monsieur de Kératry had been right when he said that a black velvet mask would go but a very little way towards disguising such a woman as Constance Danetree. There were not three women in Paris whose heads were set upon their shoulders with such a queen-like grace. The figure and bearing of this daughter of Erin were altogether exceptional. No mask could hide, on crowd efface her. Other masks flocked round her as soon as she appeared in the ball-room. Every one recognised her. One man told her that she was either Titian's Queen of Cyprus or Lady Constance Danetree. She was entreated to dance.

'Venetian matrons did not waltz,' she answered.

'No, their little amusements were of a more serious kind. They played at poisoning, and made Aqua Tofana as modern children made toffee. But that is no reason why Lady Constance Danetree should not honour one of the most devoted among her slaves,' urged an Abbé with powdered hair and diamond shoe-buckles.

'I am not Constance Danetree, but a noble Venetian of the sixteenth century, and I have never learnt the dances of the second French Empire,' she answered, sailing past him with a gracious bend of the beautiful head undisguised by any ornament save a single string of pearls twisted among the massive plaits.

She mingled with the crowd which lined the ball-room, leaving only a central space for the dancers, and moved slowly onward, pausing from time to time to talk to friends, or to watch the waltzers.

And now a new sensation made itself evident among the throng. A suppressed titter, subjugated as much as possible for decency's sake, circulated in that hall of fading roses, and glittering crystals, and myriad wax candles beginning to bend and gutter in their sockets in an atmosphere rapidly becoming tropical. A figure, unseen till a few minutes ago, had inspired the whole room with a sudden sense of the ridiculous.

It was a female figure suggestive of Rubens and the Louvre, recalling an apotheosis of Marie de Medicis, yet still more vividly recalling the nearer image of the Belle Hélène. It was a lady in the full maturity of a Flemish beauty, fat, fair, and

thirty, clad as the world is accustomed to see ladies clad across the footlights, but rarely without that intervening rampart. A woman on the stage is sacred as a priestess by an altar. She belongs to the world of art. She is a figure in a picture. She loses her individuality, and is only a part of a whole. But a woman parading a ball-room on a level with the eye, rubbing shoulders with the crowd, is only a woman; and in her case there is no excuse for a sin against womanly delicacy.

'*Tiens!*' cried a toreador as the lady passed leaning on the arm of an ambassador, '*la belle Hélène!*'

'*Hélène,*' said another; '*mais pas trop belle.*'

'*Quelle brassée de chair humaine,*' whispered a Pierrot.

'*C'est plus Schneider que Schneider,*' muttered a Roumanian gipsy.

The fair being sailed on triumphant, hearing only a vague buzz of admiration. And now the band in the ball-room struck up the march from *La Princesse de Trébizonde*, and a second orchestra hidden in the garden repeated the strain. It was a signal for supper and for unmasking. Helêne and her ambassador led the way, and the throng followed: a dense procession of splendid and eccentric costumes, jingling bells, waving plumes, clashing armour, demons, houris, Turks, crusaders.

Lady Constance Danetree, embarrassed by the number of her admirers, all entreating the honour of her hand, paused in the midst of a little circle, undecided which mask she should favour. Abbé, Pierrot, Red Indian, Mandarin, Toreador, they all pressed round her, each hoping to be chosen, when the circle was suddenly broken by a man, taller than the tallest of them by nearly half a head, a man with the red cap of Liberty on his dark short-cut hair, and his stalwart figure clad in the carmagnole jacket of '93, a costume that had a strange and almost sinister air amidst the satin and velvet, the gold and spangles, the plumes and flowers of that glittering crowd.

'If Madame will honour me——' murmured the mask, offering his arm.

Lady Constance accepted it instantly, and passed into the moonlit garden on the Republican's arm, leaving her circle of admirers *plantés là*.

'What a hideous figure!' said one.

'The ghost of revolution and bloodshed,' said another. 'The police ought not to allow such a costume. It is much too suggestive for the temper of the age.'

'I should not be surprised if the gentleman himself came from the Rue de Jerusalem. The policy of the Empire has not been to make us forget '93, but to remind us what a horrible era it was, and how lucky we are to escape a repetition of its terrors.'

The carmagnole, the red cap, the dark hair, the firm chin under the velvet mask, the tall figure and stately shoulders, the low resonant voice—not for a moment had Constance Danetree doubted the individuality of this ghost of the fatal year of '93.

Her heart beat fast and loud as she walked by the unknown's side across the moonlit grass—slowly, lingeringly, prolonging to the uttermost that brief journey towards the great marquee yonder, the canvas doors of which were drawn wide apart, revealing the dazzling interior—circular tables diminishing in diameter towards the centre, circles within circles, on the plan of the Exposition, and all the tables flashing with silver and many-coloured glass, flowers, china, and all those artistic compositions in the way of pastry and confectionery which elevate cookery to a fine art. The banquet had an air of Fairyland under the electric light. The guests, in their rainbow colours and tinsel and gems, were crowding round the tables, filling in the circles.

'I do not believe there will be room for us in there,' said Lady Constance.

'Do you think not?' said the Carmagnole, eagerly. 'Would you rather sit here in the moonlight, and let me bring you some supper, or would it be too cold?'

'Cold! the atmosphere is positive enjoyment after that tropical ball-room. If you do not mind the trouble, I had much rather sit here.'

There were groups of rustic chairs and little Japanese tables scattered about in the cool verdant garden, and already some of these had been pounced upon by those couples who would always rather sup in a quiet corner *tête-à-tête* were it never so cramped or inconvenient.

The Carmagnole selected the pleasantest spot, a rustic bench sheltered from the night wind by a group of magnolias, masses of dark, shining verdure with whtie goblet-shaped blossoms.

Here Lady Constance seated herself while the Carmagnole went in quest for supper. He had not far to go; the attendance was perfect, and he had a servant at his command in a few minutes arranging the little rustic table, bringing delicatest dishes, and iced champagne in a great glass pitcher.

From a marquee came a Babel of voices. Masks had been just this moment removed. La Belle Hélène, in the person of the Baroness Clavaroche, was in the central circle welcoming her guests. Some of the greatest people in Paris were among that motley crowd. Not the Emperor, whose declining health was a reason for his absence from any private festival; nor the Empress, who had never taken kindly to Madame Clavaroche.

But short of the very highest, there was no spleudour of name or title wanting to the Baroness's ball.

'A brilliant scene,' said Constauce, with her face turned towards the marquee.

She had not yet removed her mask, nor had the Carmagnole.

'And to-morrow there will be nothing left of it but a memory,' he answered, gravely. 'Happy those for whom the memory will be linked with a face they love, not a mere garish vision of strange faces and strange finery.'

'Will it be a sweet or a bitter memory for you, Monsieur Ishmael?' asked Constance, smiling at him under the lace border of her mask.

'You know me, then?' he said, half-surprised.

'Do you suppose that piece of black velvet across your face can hide your individuality? You would be a very commonplace person if you could disguise yourself so easily.'

'You knew me from the first moment, then?' he said, laying aside his mask, looking at her with eyes dark with deepest feeling as they sat opposite each other at the little supper table, half in moonlight and half in shadow.

If Madame Clavaroche's guests in general had been as indifferent to the pleasures of the table as these two, the banquet might as well have been a stage-feast of painted fruit and empty goblets. Lady Constance had eaten half a peach, and her companion had emptied his champagne glass, and that was all. The attentive footman, seeing them preoccupied, whisked off the dainty little dishes to a table on the other side of the garden, where a columbine and a Mexican post-boy were clamorous for food.

'Yes, I knew you from the first.'

'And you honoured me with your arm in preference to those gentlemen round you—some of the most distinguished names in France.'

'I see those great people every day; and you are a stranger. There is always a pleasure in novelty.'

She spoke in her easiest manner—gracious, calm, beautiful beyond all other women in that crowded scene where beautiful women were many. But her heart was beating passionately. She felt that this man, who had so long and so persistently avoided her, would not have thrown himself in her way to-night without a motive. The motive would reveal itself presently, perhaps. In the meantime her duty as a woman was to be as calm as marble, to ask no questions, to reveal no warmer interest than that faint curiosity which society calls sympathy.

'It is very good of you to remember that it is long since we met,' said Ishmael; and then, in a lower voice, 'to me the time

has been intolerably long, and I thought it was to be only the beginning of a hopeless for ever.'

'Indeed!' exclaimed Lady Constance, lightly; 'yet, as your isolation from society was a voluntary retirement, I do not see that you have any right to complain. I was informed that you were one of the few who refused the Baroness's invitation for to-night?'

'That is quite true.'

'And yet you are here?'

'And yet I am here. Within an hour or two of my coming I had no idea of being here. Lady Constance, can you imagine that the whole conditions of a man's life may be changed in a few hours? That a man who has been a slave, fettered and tied by an obligation of the past, may suddenly find himself free—the chain snapped asunder—his own master. Such a change has happened in my life. I am my own master—free to go where I like, to see whom I like—free to love and to woo a noble and perfect woman, and to win her if I can.'

He was leaning across the narrow table, his clasped hands resting upon it, his eyes looking into her eyes. Never had the dark, finely-featured face looked handsomer than under the scarlet cap of Liberty, flushed with gladness, the eyes shining in the moonlight, the lips tremulous with deepest feeling.

Constance Danetree's eyelids drooped under that intense gaze. She tried to make light of the situation and to stave off the *dénouement*.

'You have changed your mind, then, since last June, when you told Mademoiselle Jarzé that you never intended to marry?'

'Yes; for in those days I fancied myself bound by an old tie. And now I know that tie has long been broken, and I am free—have been free for years past but did not know of my liberty.'

'You are talking enigmas,' said Constance.

'Shall I speak more plainly?' he asked, drawing still nearer to her, lowering his voice lest the very leaves of the magnolia, whispering gently to themselves all the while, should have ears to hear him, 'in plainest, simplest, truest words, as befits a plain man? I loved you from the first, Constance—from the first sweet hour when we met amidst the frivolous surroundings of a Parisian salon. From that hour I was your slave—your worshipper. I had found my ideal, the realisation of an old, old dream—the one woman in this world whom I could reverence and adore. I had found her, and my heart went to her as the tide goes to the shore, impelled by a force it knows not, save to know that it is irresistible. I had found her—yes, but too late! I was bound, or believed myself bound, by that old tie. And yet I went on meeting you—went on worshipping you—although

these lips were scrupulously dumb ; went on treading nearer and nearer the verge of an abyss of dishonour. I might have disregarded that old bondage of which the world knew so little ; might have ignored the past. Yes, this is how Satan would have argued had I lent my ear. The day came when I felt that I must go no further ; that from this fool's paradise I must escape at any cost to myself. And then, half hoping you would guess that I was in some wise the slave of circumstances, I told you that I meant never to marry ; and in that hour I left your house, meaning never to trust myself in your presence again. I have lived the life of a hermit since that hour ; and now I am a free man, Lady Constance—free to win a noble wife if I can !'

He took her unresisting hand and raised it to his lips. He had drawn his chair nearer to hers in the shadow of the magnolias, and the table was no longer between them.

'Constance, will you give me no word of hope ?'

'Is the tie of which you speak really broken ?' she asked, gravely. 'Have you the right to ask for my love ?'

'The tie is broken—by death.'

'And there is nothing in your past life—no dishonour, no taint—which can lessen your worth in the eyes of such a woman as I.'

'There is no taint—no dishonour. Commercially, all Paris can tell you what I am. Socially, I will answer for myself. I have done no wrong !'

'And you really love me ?'

'As women are rarely loved.'

'I am very glad,' she murmured, softly, as he bent to listen for his fate. 'I am glad you love me, Ishmael, for my heart went out to you with just the same irresistible impulse that night we first met. I knew then that it was fate. Thank God, it is a happy fate, and that you give me love for love.'

## CHAPTER XXXVII

### 'LET HIM DRINK AND FORGET HIS POVERTY'

HALF-AN-HOUR later, and the festival was beginning to wane. Above the many-coloured lights of the garden—rose-coloured lights, azure, and amber, and sapphire, and emerald, a fairy illumination—the moon was sloping westward, while the clear, cold eastern sky grew clearer, colder, brighter with an almost ghastly brightness—ghastly in its effect upon some of those unmasked faces, talking, laughing, drinking in the great circular marquee, still thronged with revellers, some of whom had been eating and drinking, and talking and flirting for an hour and more, while others had gone away and come back again, and while some had only just torn themselves away from the ball-room to come in at the fag-end of the feast. The more sober among the revellers were going home, scared by that opal light in the east. Faded beauties had resumed their masks. Mystification was rife, some among the revellers all the more easily puzzled, perhaps, after their enjoyment of the Clavaroche champagne, which was of the best brand ever landed on the quays of Bercy yonder, where, before the aristocratic night was over, the docks would be astir with the beginning of the working day.

In the ball-room the waltzers were revolving to a strange wild music, a Cossack melody, dissonant, almost diabolical in its shrill minor, with a strange staccato accompaniment of violoncellos and double-basses, as of a dance of witches round a caldron. The flame of the candles, the flash of crystals, the interwoven rose-garlands made a cloud of rosy light above the dancers; the mirrors on the wall reflected and multiplied the motley throng until it seemed an endless carnival, stretching into infinite distances.

The clocks of Paris were striking three when Ishmael re-entered the ball-room with Lady Constance on his arm on the way to her carriage. For more than an hour they had sat talking in the shadow of the magnolias, while the light feet of pleasure passed and repassed upon the velvet lawn. He had told her his real name, and the story of his boyhood at Pen-Hoël, his stepmother's jealousy, his father's indifference. He had not even shrunk from the terrible revelation of his mother's

guilty flight ; but this he had touched on with but fewest words. The details of disgrace were untold. It was only in extenuation of his father's unkindness that he confessed his mother's dishonour.

But of his marriage and of Pâquerette's sin he said nothing. It was enough, in his own mind, that he had spoken of a tie now severed. Constance would draw her own inferences. He could not bring himself to enter upon the miserable story of his wedded life.

And now they were going to part for a few hours, with the sweet certainty of meeting daily, of being together in a privileged companionship day by day, until the hour of those espousals which should blend two lives into one. Each felt that in the other lived the one friend and companion who could make existence perfect. There was a sympathy, a sense of trustfulness and security rarely felt even between true lovers. Two minds that had ripened slowly in the double school of thought and experience, two hearts tried and tested, bound themselves in a solemn and sacred union ; and in neither was there the shadow of wavering. Each knew that this union of heart and mind meant true and lifelong love.

As they crossed the ball-room they were met by Amélie, with her three-cornered hat stuck jauntily on one side, and her eyes sparkling with mischief.

'Such fun,' she exclaimed to Lady Constance : 'the two poets are here. The little Vicomte, dressed as Ronsard—such a pretty costume—only he has to explain it to everybody, and even then nine out of ten have not the least idea who Ronsard was. People are so ignorant,' added the columbine, contemptuously.

'Yes, people are ignorant,' said Kératry, laughing at her. 'I don't think you knew much about Ronsard till I told you half an hour ago. Yes, Lady Constance, they are both here. The poor devil who scrawls in a garret, and the dainty little man who publishes his carmine-sedition with Firmin-Didot—the *petit crevé* and the *teinturier*—and I'm afraid, after the manner in which I saw the *teinturier* disposing of the Clavaroche cognac at the buffet just now, there may be an explosion of some kind before he leaves the ball.'

'How did he get here?' asked Constance, who had been told all about that literary interview in the Quartier Latin.

'I can guess how it all came about,' exclaimed Amélie, who was always eager to give information. 'Hortense has been plaguing the poor little Vicomte to write some verses about this ball, descriptive, satirical, personal—the sort of thing to set half Paris by the ears ; and knowing his own incapacity, the little

wretch has extorted a card from Madame Clavaroche, and has brought his friend of the Quartier Latin—the author of *Mes Nuits Blanches*.'

'*Mes Nuits Blanches*,' repeated Ishmael. 'What do you know of the man who wrote that book, Mademoiselle?'

'Ah, Monsieur Ishmael,' cried Amélie; 'is that you? How can you venture to wear the cap of Liberty in a house which is Imperialist to the last degree? What do I know of the author of *Mes Nuits Blanches?* Very little; but he and Monsieur de Kératry are like brothers.'

'You know Hector de Valnois?' said Ishmael; 'and he is here to-night!'

'A man who wrote a book of verses called *Mes Nuits Blanches* is here to-night, dressed as François Villon, and, I am afraid, not in a condition to do credit to the Muses,' replied de Kératry; 'but, as the father of our lyric poets was an arrant Bohemian and blackguard, that hardly matters. Were Villon here in the flesh, he would no doubt be as drunk as his representative. The man I mean calls himself Monsieur Nimporte, and lives in a little street at the back of the Luxembourg. Do you know his real name and his history?'

'I knew something about him many years ago,' answered Ishmael, as he passed on to the vestibule with Constance on his arm.

The court-yard was full of carriages, and the grave old street beyond was illuminated by the long rows of carriage lamps, garish in the pearly light of morning. Lady Constance and her companion had to wait some time for her brougham to be brought up to the door. They stood side by side under the *marquise*, amidst the orange trees and rose bushes which decorated the double flight of steps and the wide, stately doorway—stood and talked to each other, happy in the new, sweet sense of union. Yet no longer on Ishmael's part was the gladness without alloy. He was thinking of his false friend, the traitor, the seducer, the destroyer. He was waiting with feverish eagerness for the moment that was to bring them face to face at last, after long years, by accident, in a crowded ball-room. What matter where they met so that they stood sword in hand, foot to foot, at last? As he parted with Constance at the door of her brougham, and as he bent once more to kiss the gloved hand, there was a gloomy vision before his eyes. Ere the world were a day older, this new delicious dream of life might end for him suddenly, amidst the thickening shadows of a bloody death.

He watched the carriage roll away in the circular sweep of the court-yard, through the pillared gateway, and then he went

back to the ball-room and to the garden beyond to look for his enemy, the bitter foe whose face he had never seen since they parted in friendship, hand clasping hand, smiling lips uttering fair words. How diligently he had sought for this man in the years that were past and gone, using all known means of search, employing those skilled in hunting down their fellow-men ; and all his inquiries had been in vain. All his hired agents had failed. And now, upon this night above all other nights, this magical, ineffable hour in man's life, in the first hour of triumphant love, he was told that the traitor was under the same roof that sheltered him, the injured husband.

He thought of Pâquerette in the days of her innocence, unspoiled by the knowledge of evil. He thought of their child, lying in her little grave in the field of rest. He thought of Pâquerette's death, the ghastly story which he had heard a few hours ago—that lonely death on a rotten ship far out in the lonely Pacific. And was he to spare this man when they two should stand face to face?

It was in the garden—chosen resort of the revellers and the drinkers—the people who eat half-a-dozen suppers in an evening, the men who would rather sit in corners and smoke and drink absinthe or kirsch than waltz to the music of the first band in Paris under a shower of fading roseleaves. It was among the fast and the furious that Ishmael looked for his foe.

The garden was crowded with maskers, and had a look as of a witch's Sabbath in the cold, clear dawn—a light which gave a ghastly look to common things, and made the entrance to the great striped marquee, with its flare of light, and clamour of voices, and glare of gewgaw decorations, seem like the entrance to Tophet. Ishmael walked slowly in and out among the groups of revellers, half in the light of Chinese lanterns, lurid, multi-coloured, half in the steel-blue morning. He walked in and out by winding pathways, amidst great masses of evergreens so arranged as to give an air of space and grandeur to the town garden, till he came to a group around a fountain—a wide marble basin with a marble Triton spouting water high up into the morning air.

A man was sitting on the broad margin of the basin spouting verse—a man in a shabby mediæval costume, rusty velvet doublet, black trunk hose, pointed shoes, a broken rope hanging loose round his neck, suggestive of that hangman's noose which Maitre Villon so narrowly escaped. A thin, wasted figure ; a pale face, with iron-gray hair flowing in the morning breeze ; a sickly pallor that gave a spectral air to the light blue eyes, just now illuminated with the fever of strong drink.

'Bravo, Maitre François,' cried the little audience, when the poet paused.

Ishmael stood outside the circle, looking at the pale, wan face; at the tremulous hands with which the poet took bottle and glass from one of his audience and poured out a bumper of champagne.

'Do you know, gentlemen, that Widow Cliquot and I have been strangers for years,' he said, in his drunken voice: '*à ta santé, ma belle veuve*, thou art the poet's only nepenthe.'

He drank a long draught, and then flung his glass into the fountain, shattering it into splinters that flew like a shower of diamonds across the sparkling waters.

'A Jewish wedding,' he cried, 'symbol of eternal union—the marriage of the poet and the queen of vineyards, *la belle Cliquot*.'

And then he burst again into verse, maundering verse, a *pot-pourri* of Villon, Ronsard, Voiture: the lees and rinsings of a memory that had once been richly stored. His limbs had the spasmodic trembling of the absinthe-drinker. Those pale eyes of his had the look that forebodes a day when the brain behind them will be a blank.

Ishmael pushed through the crowd, and gripped the troubadour by the shoulder.

'Hector de Valnois!' he said, in a loud voice, 'you were once a man, and in those days you were a consummate scoundrel, the seducer of the innocent and simple, the betrayer of your friend. In those days—thirteen years ago—I wrote you a letter. I have been waiting for the answer ever since. I am waiting still. In that letter I threatened to strike you in the open street if we two met before I was sure of my revenge. I would strike you to-night, here—spurn you like a dog, disgrace you before your fellow-men—if you were in your right senses. But I would almost as soon strike a woman as a drunken driveller like you. For to-night you are safe; but, unless you are a coward lower than common cowards, you will send me an answer to my letter to-morrow morning. You know my name. I live in the Place Royale.'

'Bravo, Monsieur Carmagnole, *à la lanterne* with your foe!' cried the chorus round the poet.

Ishmael had held that wasted figure in a firm grip as he spoke, his fingers clutching the collar of the doublet. He loosed his hold suddenly, turned on his heel, and walked away, the crowd parting before him.

The poet broke into a peal of shrill laughter, chuckled and crowed, rolled over in very exuberance of hysterical mirth, and tumbled backwards into the fountain amidst a chorus of laughter from the crowd.

'*C'est epatant*,' said one.

'*On se tord*,' cried another, while a good Samaritan, dressed like the old provençal Bluebeard, with ferocious azure moustachios, pulled the poet out of the marble basin.

He looked round at them wildly, shivering in every limb.

'Ishmael!' he muttered, 'Ishmael! The man whose life I saved on the fourth of December. So much for gratitude! I'll go home. My coach, gentlemen, my coach, as Ophelia says, in Shakespeare's play. Tieck and Schlegel is the best translation; not de Vigny, nor even Charles Hugo. There is no good French Hamlet. My coach, gentlemen. But where is my friend, the little poet—Baudelaire in miniature—Musset *pour rire*—Ronsard, Voiture, the little Vicomte de Pontchartrain?'

His voice rose shrill above the crowd as he crossed the lawn towards the open windows of the great rose-garlanded *salon*, where the dance was dying away slowly, softly, in its last languid circles, to the waltz in Gounod's 'Faust.' Two of those last dancers, Ronsard and a Grecian Sibyl, heard that drunken call from the threshold. To one it was a sound full of alarm.

'Pardon me,' said the Vicomte, letting fall his partner's hand and leaving the white-robed sibyl alone in the sea of dancers, deserted, desolate as Ariadne at Naxos. 'I must go to my friend.'

And then, having darted across the room to the open window at which Valnois stood shivering in his wet black raiment, ashy pale, the very ghost of pleasure and revelry, Pontchartrain caught him roughly by the arm and exclaimed—

'In Heaven's name, come away. What do you mean by making a spectacle of yourself?'

'Only remembering the days that are gone. Will you take me to my den in your carriage, or shall I go straight to Sainte-Anne? I am fitter for the hospital than anywhere else—except my grave.'

They went out together. It was a hurried exit, which gave no opportunity for any adieu to Hortense. She had gone back to her mother, who was sitting on a divan in the vestibule among a little cluster of chaperons, powdered *à la Pompadour*, gorgeous in brocade and diamonds, or with high curling heads *à la Maintenon*, yawning behind their fans, desperately weary. For the middle-aged the end of such mirth is heaviness.

Madame Jarzé sent some one in quest of the Columbine, who was one of the last dancers in this last waltz, but who answered the maternal summons reluctantly.

'It is the last ball of the season, mamma,' she said, discontentedly; 'you need not hurry us away.'

'Hurry!' echoed Hortense, chagrined at Apollo's desertion; 'why, we have made ourselves a spectacle by stopping after all

the best people have gone. Even Madame Clavaroche has disappeared, and I believe the Baron went to bed ages ago.'

'Poor Baron, how pleasant it must have been to him to see people laughing at his wife,' said Kératry.

'That is the great advantage of a masked ball,' replied Amélie; 'one can laugh at one's best friends with every appearance of innocence. When we come to the Baroness's afternoon *causerie* next week we shall all be serious, and we shall tell her that she looked lovely as *la belle Helène*.'

## CHAPTER XXXVIII

### 'DARKNESS FOR LIGHT, AND LIGHT FOR DARKNESS'

ISHMAEL walked home in the calm morning air through the silent, sleeping city, where the only signs of life were in the region of the great central markets, on the quays, and on the bridges, across which the great waggons were slowly creeping, laden with the produce of distant fields and gardens, farms and orchards. To him this aspect of newly-awakened Paris was of all her aspects the most familiar. He loved the quiet of her streets in the clear morning light. He had walked from barrier to barrier across all the width of the city on many a summer morning when his mind was full of some new scheme, and he had to fight his way through the mechanical difficulties of the work, to strike out new paths, to overcome obstacles that had barred the progress of his predecessors in the same kind of work.

To-day it was not of some great combination of stone and iron that he had to think—the thoughts that agitated him were of his own life and his own destiny, and interwoven with that life and destiny the fate of the woman he adored. Life and love smiled upon him all in a moment after long years of shadow and gloom. All things were well with him save this new peril which had come upon him like a thunderclap in the midst of his delight—the peril of bloodshed, the chance of slaying his old enemy, or being slain by him. For years he had waited for this chance, had courted the opportunity, had held himself cheated in so much as his own honour and his wife's sin remained unavenged. And now the hour of vengeance had struck, and it seemed to him an evil hour.

Could he recoil from the chance when it offered? He remembered his challenge to the seducer, the pencilled scrawl thrust into the frame of the looking-glass. Was this challenge to prove but an idle threat because of the passage of time? There are wounds that time can heal, wrongs that time can lessen, but not such a wound or such a wrong as this.

Yet what a work had time done since the hour of Pâquerette's flight—Time, the avenger: what a wreck had time made of his enemy! That haggard, ashen face, with its hollow eyes and hollow cheeks, haunted him like the face of the very dead. It was like an awful caricature—a ghastly Wiertz picture—of the

man he had known years ago—the poet, the jester, a little faded by a life of late hours and intellectual labour, full of joyousness and keen zest for pleasure. Now what a wreck! what a pale shadow of that brilliant youth! Ishmael's heart sank as he pictured the meeting with that ruin of a man. Sword in hand, foot to foot with a spectre! Could they two meet on equal terms?

He stayed at home all the morning, waiting for a message from his foe. It would be late, perhaps, before the drunken jester of last night would be sober enough to think and to remember; but when thought and memory came, Hector de Valnois would surely answer as a gentleman should answer, even a gentleman in ruins.

The morning seemed passing weary to Ishmael as he paced up and down his study, waiting for a message from his foe, and pining to be on his way to the villa in the Bois de Boulogne, a privileged guest. His papers lay untouched upon his desk. He could neither work nor read. He could think of nothing but the agitating scenes of last night. In one moment his thoughts were of Constance and a blissful future; in the next he was haunted by the vision of Pâquerette's pale face, the ship in mid-ocean, the lonely death.

At last the expected messenger came in the person of Armand de Kératry, with whom Ishmael was tolerably intimate from frequent meetings at the Jarzés and at other haunts of idle youth.

'I have spent the last two hours with your old friend—and your old foe, Monsieur,' he said; 'and I am charged by him to offer you satisfaction for all past wrongs. He will meet you when you like, where you like, will give you the choice of weapons. He acknowledges some deep wrong done you in the past, the nature of which he has not communicated to me. I can only say that the wrong must be indeed foul and unpardonable if it can justify your thirst for revenge in your own mind and in the sight of your fellow-man—to say nothing of the eye of Heaven, which, I suppose, we may dismiss as an idle superstition.'

'It is no superstition in my mind, Monsieur de Kératry,' answered Ishmael. 'The wrong done to me by Hector de Valnois was the deadliest wrong one man can do another—a wrong that justifies me in demanding that man's life although he once saved mine. There are some injuries that can only be washed out with blood. I have waited for years for this atonement, and atonement is doubly due now—due to the dead, to the victim of that villain's treachery. Why should I hold my hand to-day?'

'Because to meet that man with sword or pistol in hand

would be nothing less than murder. Do you think that wreck of manhood, that mere shadow of a man, can meet you upon equal terms? Do you think that shaking hand, made tremulous by the slow poison of absinthe, can have the faintest chance with sword or pistol against your nerves of steel and muscles of iron? Can the dead stand up against the living? You in the pride of undamaged manhood, he the exhausted victim of an evil life, of poverty, disappointment, despair. Would you call upon a ghost to atone for the wrongs done by the living man? I tell you Hector de Valnois is no better than a ghost. If you meet him, the duel will be suicide on his part, on yours murder.'

'Did he tell you to appeal to my compassion?'

'No; a thousand times, no. The spirit of manhood is not extinct even after years of poverty, absinthe, degradation. He told me to come to you and arrange a speedy meeting—this afternoon if you like, an hour before sunset, in a quiet hollow beyond Vincennes. He described the spot to me — not too remote, yet secluded and safe. No, he has no wish to avoid a meeting; he has an ardent desire to facilitate one: the feverish haste of a man to throw away a life that has long seemed worthless. But there is such a thing as compunction even on the part of the deadliest foe; and I tell you that to meet this man would be murder, a crime that would weigh heavy on your conscience, a sin that would haunt you to your dying day. The man is nothing to me, remember—a chance acquaintance who has been useful to me in literature, and whom I have paid for his work. I plead to you as man to man, more in your own interest than in his.'

'My own interest, my own inclination alike prompt me to hear you,' answered Ishmael, gravely. 'If I cannot meet him on equal terms, I cannot meet him at all. After what I saw last night—well, yes; you are right. How could that shaking hand hold a sword against mine, which has grappled with a young lion in Algeria. You are right. I must not meet him although I cannot forgive him. If I alone had been the sufferer, pardon might be possible; but there is one dead – dead, broken-hearted —whom he wronged worse than he wronged me. Her injuries can never be purged except by the fire that burns away all sin. Tell Hector de Valnois that I decline his offer of satisfaction. It comes too late. Neither his blood nor mine can bring back the dead, or undo the past. Tell him for the life he saved on the fourth of December, I give him his own; and that, so far, life for life, we are quits. Let him forget that he and I ever knew each other. Let him forget his victim—if he can.'

And then after a moment or so of hesitation, he added,

hurriedly, taking some notes from his desk and handing them to Armand:

'You tell me he is in straitened circumstances. I shall be grateful to you if you will relieve him—as though from your own purse. He gave me his bed once, and dressed my wounds. I thought him a good Samaritan in those days.'

Armand de Kératry took the little packet of bank-notes without a word.

'I expected no less from you,' he said. 'I know that you are a brave man as well as a good man, and no brave man would meet a foe upon unequal terms.'

They shook hands and parted, and Ishmael felt as if a terrible burden was lifted off his mind by the result of this interview. To slay or to be slain: neither a pleasant contingency for a man who has just won the crowning grace of a prosperous career—the love of the woman he adores. It was two o'clock in the afternoon. He had not taken any rest since the previous day. How long ago it seemed now! What a deep ravine had yawned asunder in the level monotony of daily life, dividing yesterday from to-day! He threw himself into an easy-chair, and slept for an hour or more from sheer exhaustion; then dressed and drove to the villa in the Bois—that luxurious home whose threshold he had not crossed since the June afternoon when he avowed his intention never to marry. And now he entered the hall with a firm, free step, as the affianced of the mistress of the house.

The dogs came out and fawned upon him in friendly welcome before the servant could announce him. 'Did *she* send them?' he wondered. He was a man to whom animals came as by an instinct, sure in advance of his good will. Lion, the colley, put his nose into the visitor's hand and went into the *salon* with him, while Bijou walked composedly by his side, looking up at him with serious black eyes as if she had been expecting him for ages. And in the sunny window, with a little world of greensward, fountain, and roses outside, Constance was waiting for him with sweetest welcome.

And now began for Ishmael the halcyon days of his life—a time of sweet communion with the chosen among all womankind—of growing intimacy with a nobler nature than it had been his lot to know until now. It was the absolute fulfilment of his youthful dream—a loftier soul than his own, stooping from higher spheres to bear him company on earth. What bliss to be understood as he had never been understood before—to find perfect sympathy, perfect comprehension—to have his ambition no longer regarded as the common-place contractor's

greed of gain, but understood from a loftier standpoint, as the engineer's glory in great achievements, in difficulties vanquished, rough ways made smooth.

They had so much to talk about in the present and the future, that it is scarcely strange if he told her but little of the past, since to have gone back upon the story of those early days would have been to go too near the darkest passages of his life. He told her of his wild free life in Brittany, of his scanty stock of learning acquired from good Father Bressant, of the circumstances that had driven him from his home, touching but lightly on his father's injustice, his stepmother's ill-will; of his marriage he said nothing beyond that first confession that the breaking of an old tie had left him free. Constance had drawn her own inferences, and had made up her mind that some sad story was involved in this old tie; and, for her part, she so gloried and rejoiced in his love, she was so proud of having won for her lover a man of a different stamp from all the other men she had ever encountered—the ideal man; in a word, the worker, the victor, the man who had faced difficulties and overcame them, and whose wealth of knowledge in all things was only less than his modest appreciation of his own acquirements. She was so proud of her lover, that it never entered into her mind to be curious about the details of his life. She was delighted to listen when she could win him to talk of himself; but she never questioned him. Her faith in him was boundless.

And so the summer days wore on, and the season waned, and all the gorgeous-winged butterflies of Parisian society had flown Southward to bluer skies, to game and dance, and flirt and gossip, and dress and paint beside the tideless Mediterranean, only transferring Parisian habits, Parisian extravagances, Parisian luxurious living to the towns scattered along the Rivièra. The Parisian was gone out of Paris, and only the trampling of tourists—American, English, Belgian, German—populated the Boulevards and kept up the clink of glasses, the crowd of idlers, at the little tables on the pavement in the sultry heat of July afternoons.

Constance and her lover cared nothing for the departure of these children of fashion and folly. They only waited till certain legal preliminaries should be arranged, settlements drawn, communications made with the lady's kindred, and so on. Lord Kilrush wrote to express his gratification at his daughter's engagement to so worthy a suitor as Monsieur Ishmael, whose reputation was European, and at the same time conveyed his regret at being under a medical régime, which forbade his leaving Homburg even for a few days, and thus prevented his presence at the marriage ceremony.

## CHAPTER XXXIX

### 'THOU DOST DWELL AMONG SCORPIONS'

IT was the eve of Ishmael's wedding-day, the eve of a sultry day at the beginning of August.

The heat had been oppressive even amidst the murmuring boughs of the Champs Elysées and that fair wood beyond; and with the evening the air grew heavier as with the presage of a thunderstorm, whereupon all the inhabitants of western Paris who knew how to live drifted towards the wood and the cascade to eat ices and smoke cigarettes betwixt starshine and lamplight, to flirt or gossip to a *pianissimo* accompaniment of rushing waters and waving leaves.

The train of carriages, with their coloured lamps, looked like an army of glowworms creeping along the leafy avenues under the shades of night. Not a Jehu in all Paris but had his fare on this August evening. The heat of those dazzling cafés on the Boulevards was insupportable; theatres were suggestive of the Black Hole at Calcutta; and even the stranger, to whom the Parisian Boulevards are a wonder and a delight, pined for fresher air and an escape from the glare and the din.

But if the summer night was sultry and stifling on the Boulevards and in the Palais Royal, what was it in the slums and low neighbourhoods which hang on the skirts of Paris like a foul fringe upon an Imperial robe? There were slums and loathsome spots still left even in the heart of this splendid Haussmann-ised city; and if there were ashes and blackness within the core of the golden apple, how much the more might such evil things be looked for outside, remote from the dwellings of those who wear purple and fine linen.

Far from the roll of carriage wheels, the tramp of thoroughbred horses, the glitter of palaces, and the bloom of palace gardens, is a sordid external zone of filth and poverty, and famine and fever—a world that knew not Imperial Cæsar save as a name—a name which might mean anything, but which certainly did *not* mean food and clothing and decent shelter.

Among these regions of outermost darkness in the far north of Paris, near Clichy—a region as little known to the ordinary Parisian visitor as the North Pole itself—there is a small settle-

ment given over, for the most, to the rag-picking confraternity, and known as the Cité du Soleil.

It is not to the beauty of its situation, nor to the dazzle of gilded domes and pinnacles, that this City of the Sun owes its name ; nor has it been so christened in irony. The simple reason that the place has been so called is, that the waste ground about those wretched hovels has been planted time out of mind with sunflowers, which thrive amidst the surrounding squalor, and encircle the dwellings of the outcast with an aureole.

Rich in all loathsome odours, black with the grime of ages, this City of the Sun surpasses all the other settlements of the surrounding plain in squalor and hideousness. Where all are vile, this ranks as vilest. The narrow alleys which separate the huts where the rag-pickers sleep on their rags are mere muddy channels, in which children, dogs, and swine crawl and grovel, fighting with each other for the bones, the stale cabbage-stumps, the putrid lobster-shells which fall from the rag-pickers' baskets. The fronts of the rotten old hovels are decorated with skeletons of cats, skulls of dogs, foxes' brushes. The sickening stench of the place overpowers the passer-by at ten yards distance.

The road near which lies this colony of dirt and poverty is called the Route de la Révolte. The very name is sinister, but the actuality is even more terrible—a long dreary road which goes from Neuilly to St. Denis, muddy in winter, dusty in summer—a road which pierces a world given over to squalor and disrepute ; nay, too often made notorious by some dark history of crime —a region of waste places and dilapidated buildings, the comfortless shelter of mountebanks and beggars, scavengers, Israelitish merchants in broken glass and rabbit skins, chair-menders—a region in whose pestiferous alleys, and above whose stagnant gutters hang the germs of typhoid and typhus, the seeds of phthisis, the taint of cholera-morbus. Only the acclimatised can exist in that polluted atmosphere.

On this August night not a breath of air stirred in the City of the Sun, where the sunflowers were just unfolding their golden rays. A hot and heavy mist brooded over the dilapidated roofs and rickety chimneys ; over the pigs, lazier than their wont, as they sprawled in the sultry eventide ; the children ; the gaunt, lean curs, lowest specimens of the dog family, and seemingly a peculiar breed of mongrel, engendered of poverty and dirt.

It was between eight and nine o'clock. The mountebanks and beggars, the lame, the halt, and the blind were crawling home, shuffling off their various infirmities as they came along. The sickly children, ill enough, in all conscience, with the chronic

disease of poverty, yet simulating other maladies; the widows who never had husbands; the orphans whose fathers are waiting at home to beat them; the men with organs, with monkeys, and with performing dogs; these, jocund some of them, weary all, are creeping back to their nests, while the rag-pickers are going out. In an hour the City of the Sun will be almost deserted by the profession by which it is particularly affected. But there are some few dwellers in those evil-smelling dens who are not of the brotherhood of the basket and lantern, and these are the more dangerous inhabitants of the place. From these the City of the Sun derives its second name of the Little Mazas, so called because its occupants have either just come from prison, or are just going there.

In one of the hovels, a den in a dark corner furthest from the highway, a woman lay on a wretched pallet, gazing at the waning light, drawing her breath heavily as if each respiration were a labour and a pain. An old crone, bent, withered, wrinkled, crouched beside the hearth, upon which an iron pot simmered and bubbled above a handful of embers. The entire furniture of the room consisted of the pallet-bed, two broken chairs, an old egg box which did duty for a table, and a heap of rags in a corner, which served the crone for a bed.

The woman had been languishing in that wretched den for weeks, wasting in the deadly grip of pulmonary disease. There had been days on which she rallied and was able to crawl about in the sunshine, seized now and again with that terrible cough of hers, obliged to hold on to some dilapidated railing or doorpost while she was shaken by the convulsive violence of a coughing fit which almost meant suffocation. There had been days on which she had crept into Paris, and had crawled as far as the Boulevard Montmârtre, and looked with her wan ghost-face at the crowd and the movement of the city, only to go back to her hovel exhausted by the exertion, and, to all appearance, having discounted the brief remnant of her days by that imprudent waste of power.

The crone yonder had urged this dying grandchild of hers to apply for free quarters at the hospital. There she would be tended, and fed, and doctored; there she could have all she needed. Here she could have very little—a cup of wretched soup made of bones from the basket, a crust of dry bread from the same foul source. Money the crone had none, she protested; in actual truth, every farthing she earned was spent for drink. She had been a drunkard seventeen years ago in the Rue Sombreuil when that wasted form upon the pallet was young and fair. She was a drunkard now—a patron of the local *assommoir*—a consumer of

that vile brandy whose fiery flavour has won for it the name of 'vitriol,' or *casse-poitrine*, in the slang of the unlucky wretches who drink it.

Yes, that pallid, haggard face was the face of Pâquerette. Those faded eyes, gazing wearily at the setting sun seen through the open door—a fiery shield at the end of a long vista of huts and pig-styes, sheds and broken railings—those pale, sad eyes were the eyes that were once as lovely as the eyes of the Greuze in the Louvre; innocent, childlike eyes, looking up at Ishmael with the tender trustfulness of a child. They had seen the world since those days, poor faded eyes! They had looked on strange people and strange cities; they had confronted the glare of the foot-lights, the bronzed faces of men of many nations, the fumes of drink and tobacco. Yes, she had seen the world, poor little Pâquerette; she had led a life of change and adventure with her Bohemian lover. She had been rich and poor, happy and miserable. She had feasted, and she had starved, had alternated between fine clothes and rags, had shared the ups and downs of a clever, unscrupulous man, who lived by his wits; and finally there had come an end. Hector de Valnois' fortunes had taken the downward slope. His health had declined with the decline of his prosperity. He became irritable, hypochondriac, a martyr to neuralgia, a man most difficult to live with.

In Valparaiso, where Pâquerette was earning money as a singer at a French café-concert, he was seized with nostalgia, sickened for Paris, felt that in no other place could his strength revive, nowhere else could the freshness and vigour of his brain be restored. He had lost the power to write prose or poetry. It was this diabolical country which burnt up his brain with its feverish atmosphere, its hot winds and seething mists. Nor could he write in exile. He wanted contact with his fellow-men. This is why his faculty as poet, as journalist, as novelist, playwright, critic had been declining for the last ten years. He made up his mind one wakeful night—tormented by heat and mosquitoes—that he would sail for France by the next vessel that left the port.

'You will meet Ishmael, and he will kill you,' gasped Pâquerette, white with fear at the very thought of her husband's vengeance. 'He swore that he would kill you; I heard him.'

'That was ten years ago. Do you suppose he has not got over the loss of you by this time?' asked Hector, with a sneer.

It was in vain that Pâquerette pleaded. The next French steamer took them back to Marseilles, and from Marseilles they travelled to Paris without an hour's avoidable delay. They arrived in the great city almost penniless, but Hector de Valnois

was past-master of the mysteries of Parisian life—from the palace to the gutter. He found a cheap lodging in the labyrinth of narrow streets near the Luxembourg, and here Pâquerette and he existed for nearly three years, she accepted as his wife by the few who crossed the threshold of his shabby home.

Here de Valnois did journeyman's work for his old publishers, for the *Figaro*, for the *Corsaire*, working under a *nom de plume*, ashamed that the Parisian world should know the author of *Mes Nuits Blanches* had sunk to the scribbler of stray paragraphs and the puffer of wealthy advertisers. He kept aloof from all who had known him in his butterfly stage, his brief day of splendour and success. He rarely rose till noon, rarely went out of doors till nightfall. He dined at some popular restaurant in the students' quarter after everyone else's dinner was over. He was always later than other people. He was the last to leave the billiard room or the café, the last to send in his copy to the newspaper from which he drew the pittance upon which he lived.

Pâquerette earned no money in Paris. She did not even try to get an engagement at theatre or concert. First, she had a morbid dread of being seen by her husband ; secondly, her voice began to fail her soon after her return to Paris. She had caught a severe cold on the steamer on board which she and Hector travelled as second-class passengers. Her health declined ; her beauty faded ; the bird-like soprano voice grew thin and feeble. The Pâquerette of the past was dead. The white Easter daisy had faded for ever.

Poverty is but a sour soil for the fragile floweret called love. These two had been faithful to each other through changing fortunes. They had been brave and hopeful so long as in the evil hour there was a chance of change for the better. But they had sunk now into the level monotony of hopeless poverty ; and that condition of things is trying to the temper, especially to a man's temper. One day Hector disgraced his manhood eternally by telling his faithful companion that she was a burden to him, a clog, an incubus ; that his fatal passion for her had blighted his prospects, ruined his life ; that, but for her, he would have been the successor of Alfred de Musset, a favourite guest at Fontainebleau and Compiègne, a member of the Academy, a rich man. It was a burst of spleen, of wounded pride ; the bitter sense of failure ; the proud man's rage at the success of his inferiors. It was a sudden gust of all evil feelings concentrated in one angry speech. It was the passion of a moment, the savage outburst of a fallen angel stung by gadflies. It had no real significance ; but it broke Pâquerette's heart.

She answered not a word. She stood before him white as death and as motionless. She stood and watched him as he flung on his hat and dashed out of the room. It was on the edge of night, and he was going to his favourite haunt in the Place de la Sorbonne, Le Pierate, famous for its absinthe. When he was gone, she went to her bedroom and put a few things together in an old shawl, which she pinned into a little package with tremulous hands. Then she put on her rusty little black-lace bonnet, tied her black veil tightly across her hollow cheeks, and went out into the street, leaving the key with the portress as she went by.

'You can tell Monsieur I am not coming back any more, she said.

The woman stared at her, not taking in the full meaning of her words. She spoke too quietly to mean anything tragic.

She meant just what she said: never to go back to him any more. She was leaving him for ever—the man for whom she had sacrificed husband, home, good name, and all the best and brightest years of her life. She was running away just as she had run away from the Rue Sombreuil fifteen years ago to escape her grandmother's ill-treatment. Poor little Pâquerette! Her only notion of self-defence was to run away.

Fifteen years ago she had fled from the Rue Sombreuil. To-night she went back there—winding like the hunted hare to her form, and nearly as hard sped as the hunted hare. In all Paris she knew of no friend to whom she could safely appeal in her dire necessity except those first friends of hers who had looked with compassion upon her miserable girlhood. Of Lisette Moque, that fast friend of later days—the friend who had encouraged her in her folly—she thought with a shudder, for to Lisette's fatal influence she traced her own fall. The experience that should have guided her steps in the midst of danger, the worldly knowledge which should have saved her, had only been used to her disadvantage. No. Had she been starving and shelterless in the streets of Paris, she would not now have accepted shelter and food from Madame Moque.

It was a long walk from the Luxembourg to the Rue Sombreuil for limbs that had lost much of their youthful elasticity, and there was only disappointment at the end of the journey. The old portress was in her dusky den by the doorway; the courtyard and staircase looked exactly as they had looked fifteen years ago, only so much the more squalid, so much the darker, uglier, drearier by the passage of those fifteen years.

'The Benoîts are gone,' said the hag, staring hard at

Pâquerette's closely-veiled face; 'oh, but gone for ages. The little Mam'selle, she that was *jolie à croquer*, she married a baker from Rouen seven years ago, and they went to Rouen to live soon after their marriage; and then the big Mam'selle, *la grande Lisbeth*, married an Englishman, and she and the cousin, Mam'selle Toinette, went to London.'

All this had happened ages ago.

Pâquerette leaned against the greasy door-post, trembling and faint. How much she had hoped for—succour, consolation, Christian charity—here, where she found nothing. Gone to Rouen, gone to London—those old friends. To her the case seemed as hopeless as if they had gone to Siberia. How could she follow them—she, who hadonly a few francs in her shabby little purse; she, who turned cold, and faint, and weak at the slightest mental distress?

'Have you heard anything lately of a woman who once lived in those rooms?' she asked, presently, pointing to those old casements on the ground floor, which were a little cleaner than they had been in Mère Lemoine's time, and which were ornamented with a few tufts of primroses and cowslips, growing in old blacking bottles; 'But, of course, she is dead! She must have been dead for years.'

'Mère Lemoine, do you mean?' cried the portress.

Pâquerette nodded assent.

'Mère Lemoine is not dead, Madame; Mère Lemoine is as much alive as the Emperor—more so, perhaps, for people say that the Emperor has a malady which will kill him, and that he is beginning to fail already, while Mère Lemoine seems as if she would never die. It is a healthy occupation, that of a rag-picker, to be out all night in the cool air when the streets are empty and the town is quiet.'

'She is living, then?—and a rag-picker! Poor soul!'

'Well, it is not a pleasant trade; but they seem to thrive upon it. Mère Lemoine must be eighty years of age. She came into this yard within the last month. She knows that she can get a taste of brandy once in a way for the sake of old times. She is bent nearly double, withered, and wrinkled—*Dieu de Dieu*, how withered, how wrinkled! But she is alive, and as hale and hearty as you or I.'

She was still living, then, that old, old woman, the grandmother who had beaten her, and scolded her, and driven her as a fugitive from that very house; and now the time had come when Pâquerette's last hope of a refuge was from the charity of that very grandmother. The whirligig of time had brought about its own revenges. There was nothing for her save this or

the hospital. And she was not ill enough to ask State charity. If she had been, she might have preferred the hospital.

'Do you know where Mère Lemoine lives?' she asked.

'She lives in a place where a great many of the rag-pickers live.'

'In the Rue Sainte-Marguerite?'

'No, no; ever so much further off than the Rue Sainte-Marguerite. She lives up by Clichy, on the Route de la Révolte, in a place called the Cité du Soleil—a place given over to rag-pickers.'

'The Cité du Soleil,' repeated Pâquerette, faintly, for she was very tired after her walk; 'I suppose I shall be able to find the place?'

'Why not? You have a tongue in your head,' answered the woman, carelessly; for Pâquerette did not look a person likely to pay for politeness. 'You have to find your way to Clichy, and then any one will show you the Cité du Soleil.'

Pâquerette thanked her, and left the Rue Sombreuil for ever. She walked some distance in the direction of Clichy, and then, almost ready to drop, she found there was an omnibus which would carry her for a considerable stage of the journey for a few sous. This helped her, and in the spring night, between eight and nine o'clock, she arrived at the City of the Sun—just when the rag-pickers were issuing from their hovels, a little procession of old men and women, each with a lantern swinging at the end of a stick—a train of glowworms in the spring night.

Pâquerette put up her veil, and stood by the roadside to watch them go by. The stars were shining in the April sky, the night was soft and gray rather than dark. Everyone turned to look at that figure standing by the wayside with a white, wan face, evidently watching for something or someone. The rag-pickers went by slowly, moving stiffly, halting in their walk like old horses after an interval of repose. Some of them mumbled and muttered as they hobbled along as if chewing the cud of better days. Pâquerette gazed piteously at those old wrinkled faces, at the women most of all, looking for her grandmother. Almost at the tail of the dismal procession came a hag more bent and decrepit than any other example of age and misery presented by that squalid company. Her head nodded, her chin worked convulsively as she tottered along, mouthing, muttering. Her lantern shook like a light on a ship at sea, her skinny hand trembled as it clutched her staff. She, too, inquisitive even in her semi-imbecility, turned and peered with dim, bleared eyeballs at the figure by the wayside.

Something in the crone's nutcracker countenance was familiar to those sad eyes looking out of the pale face.

'Grandmother!' faltered Pâquerette, faintly.

The crone started, and then came close to her, staring at her, devouring her, with wild, haggard eyes.

'Jeanneton!' she screamed. 'It is my daughter's ghost.'

'No, grandmother; it is your daughter's daughter, broken-hearted, like her mother; wretched, and poor, and friendless, like her mother. You see it runs in the family.'

'Why, then, it is Pâquerette,' cried the hag, 'that shameless rag of a granddaughter—the child I reared out of charity, and who deserted me in my old age.'

She planted her staff upon the dusty ground, and stood leaning upon it, gazing at Pâquerette, while the squalid regiment of rag-pickers moved onward, and the twinkling lights melted and vanished in the gray eventide.

'I did wrong, grandmother; but you were too hard upon me. You beat me because I refused to marry a man I hated.'

'To hate such a man! Oh, the folly of these girls;' cried the hag: 'a man who had saved money; a man whose wife is a lady. I have seen her. Do you hear, child? I have seen the Charabia's wife. She was a servant at a wine-shop in the Rue de la Roquette—a brazen wench. He married her a year after you ran away. Ah, but she lives well; she has a warm nest. She is one of the fattest women in the Faubourg Saint-Antoine. She goes to the theatre twice a week. She wears a silk gown on Sundays. Ah, you were a fool, Pâquerette—a fool. Just like your mother. All young women are fools.'

'Yes, grandmother, I have been a fool, but not for refusing to marry the Charabia, not even for running away from you. I have been a fool, and my folly has left me without a friend, or a roof to cover me. Can you give me shelter till I can look about and do something to earn my living?'

'Shelter—but—yes; I have a home, a snug little home, and you shall share it. Folks shall not have to say that I refused shelter even to a runaway granddaughter. Your mother ran away, and she came back—back to the old nest. And you, you too have come back. Strange, very strange,' muttered the old woman, prattling on in a senile fashion as she led the way to the City of the Sun.

The City of the Sun! In all Pâquerette's varied experience she had never beheld anything so hideous as that collection of hovels, and pig-styes, and dust-heaps, all grouped together haphazard—human and porcine habitations nestling side by side, dust-heaps piled against the walls on a level with bedroom windows. The house in the Rue Sombreuil was an abode of luxury, a *bourgeoise* and *cossue* habitation, as compared with

these dilapidated shanties of worm-eaten wood, or crumbling plaster. A pane of glass here and there in a window was the rare exception that proved the rule of broken casements stuffed with brown paper, rags, old hats, and rotten straw. The chief endeavour of the inhabitants seemed to be, not to let the light in at their windows, but to keep the weather out. Thus, an old boot, or a saucepan lid was deemed an appropriate substitute for a broken pane.

And the odours: the fœtid stream of animal corruption; the rank taint of rotten vegetables; the sickly, indescribable stench, which combined all imaginable foulness in one loathsome essence—from these Pâquerette recoiled, shuddering; but the grandmother's skinny fingers gripped her shawl and drew her on.

'I have a snug little home at the end here, in a nice, sheltered corner,' she muttered, chuckling and gibbering as she went along. 'I haven't paid any rent for six months. They are a rough lot about me, and the collector got frightened the last time he came to our end of the place, and has never ventured so far since. There are some queer fellows live next to me—Italians, very quick with their knives; and they threatened to stab that fine gentleman when he came prying about with a leather money-bag across his chest and a little bottle of ink in his waistcoat pocket. He has never been near me since.'

She led the way to the *ultima Thule* of the City of the Sun—a hut more dilapidated than any they had passed yet, for the roof was half off, and the rotting rafters were covered with an old mattress and a piece of tarpaulin. There was not a pane of glass left in the old leaden casement; there was not an inch of unbroken plaster on the walls; and the floor was the primitive earth. In one corner there was a huge heap of rags; in another a smaller pile of broken glass and old metal; in the middle of the floor a collection of more valuable *débris*—bones, relics of stale fish, crusts, cabbage-stumps. These were intended to furnish Mère Lemoine's larder. On one side of the bare hearth there was an old iron pot, which formed the hag's entire *batterie de cuisine;* on the other stood a bent and battered brazen candlestick, holding a couple of inches of tallow candle, which the old woman lighted at the flame of her lantern.

Horror-stricken at the aspect of this den, Pâquerette recoiled on the very threshold. Surely it would be better to sleep under the open sky, to lie in a ditch, than to inhabit such a hole as this. But she remembered that in Paris it needs a long education in pauperism to be able to sleep out of doors, so keen are the authorities upon the amateur vagrant. She had heard Hector de Valnois describe the shifts of his Bohemian

acquaintance—the *Réfractaires* of society—their lifelong duel with the *sergents-de-ville*. And at this very moment her limbs were sinking under her with faintness and fatigue. Her feet would have refused to carry her a hundred yards further. She was sorely changed from the light-footed slip of a girl who had fled like a lapwing from the Bastille to Ménilmontant fifteen years ago. Fifteen years! Ah! what a weary time, and what a dreary change those years have brought!

'There,' cried the hag, triumphantly, pointing to the wretched pallet. 'There is a nice, comfortable bed, where you can take your ease of a night while I am toiling for a living. If you want a crust, you will find plenty there,' nodding towards the heap of nameless *débris;* 'and a savoury bone into the bargain. I must be off, or I shall lose my chances on the Boulevard Poissonnière; that's my beat. There are some rare bits to be picked up at the *restaurants* along there; and there would be much better pickings, only the little sisters of the poor get the best of everything, taking the bread out of our mouths. If'—here she hesitated, as before making a stupendous sacrifice—'if you want anything to drink, there's a taste of *casse-poitrine* left in the bottle there.'

'Brandy, do you mean?' faltered Pâquerette. 'Yes, I should like a little drop: I feel faint and sick.'

The old woman looked at her doubtfully, with a disappointed air, as of one who had expected her offer to be refused. She went over to the heap of rags, and groped for a bottle that she had hidden under the unsavoury pile. She brought it out with a reluctant air, and held it up against the flame of the candle.

'There's not much more than a taste,' she said: 'we'll share it.'

To be certain of fair play, she drank her own half first out of the bottle, which she handed afterwards to her granddaughter.

Pâquerette returned it untouched. The idea of that heap of foul rags revolted her. She could not taste anything kept in such a hiding-place.

'A little water, please,' she faltered.

Alas! water in that human kennel was less attainable than brandy. There was a rickety cask in front of a hovel three or four doors off, which received the drippings of rain water from the rotten roofs above, and this was the only supply to which Mère Lemoine ever resorted. Although loath to delay her setting forth any further, the old woman took a cracked mug from the mantel-shelf and hobbled off to fetch some water. She came back with the mug full of a blackish fluid, which Pâquerette

drank greedily, with fever-parched lips, only discovering its putrid taint after she had drunk.

She sank down upon the wretched pallet, just as she must have sunk upon the bare ground outside if there had been no such couch. Her strength was exhausted, her course was run. Loathsome as the den was, she had no power to leave it for a better shelter. Had a comfortable home been waiting for her a quarter of a mile off, she could not have crawled so far.

This was the beginning of long days and nights of pain and penance. If Pâquerette had known intervals of remorse and suffering before, those transient periods of sorrow were as light as thistle-down compared with the weight of anguish which oppressed her soul as she lay hour after hour in the solitude of her kennel—always alone, for the witch-like figure of the old grandmother squatting beside her heap of rags, sorting and separating her grimy stock-in-trade with still grimier fingers, muttering and nodding the while over her work—such companionship as this could hardly be called society. And when the rags were sorted in the chill morning hour, the crust mumbled, the bone gnawed, the hag drained her measure of *casse-poitrine* and rolled herself in a corner among her rags to sleep through the summer day. Sorry company at best.

And then the melancholy nights, when the hag was gone forth on her filthy quest in the gutters of the great city; and when the dying woman lay broad awake, gazing at the clouds sailing past in the far-off sky, or the summer stars shining in that fair infinite of which she knew so little. She had taken away the rubbish that had choked the casement, so as to get all the air she could in her den. When the old woman grumbled at the open window, Pâquerette contrived a temporary screen with her shawl and the rush seat of an old chair that had long parted with its legs; but all night while Mère Lemoine was away she had the casement open to the weather, even albeit the night was stormy, and the wind and the rain beat in upon her bed. It was air she wanted most of all, air for that labouring chest, that weary heart. Ah, what long hours of agony, of retrospection, of bitter memories! How full of sadness were the visions of her head upon her bed in those silent summer nights! silent save for a gust of evil speech, the noise of distant brawlers borne by upon the wind. What heart-rending thoughts of the might have been! What keen regret for the things which were!

It was not of her seducer that she thought most in those sad night-watches—not of him for whom she had surrendered home and good name. It was upon the image of the wronged

husband that her mind dwelt; it was upon all that life might have been had she honoured her marriage vow. It was of that lost destiny she thought. She knew now the worth of the man she had deserted; knew his value by contrast with the man for whose sake she had deserted him. She knew that she had flung away the fine gold and taken to herself the dross. She had been very faithful to that bond of dishonour. Thus far, at least, she had been superior to the herd of fallen women. She had sinned once and for ever; she had accepted the penalty of her sin. She had never tried to lessen her burden. She had borne with her lover's fitful temper, slaved for him, obeyed him, cherished him with sublime self-abnegation only to be told at last that she had blighted his life!

Her downward career had been full of trouble and weariness; but she had clung to her comrade in misfortune, all the more faithful because the road they trod together was rough and thorny. And at the end of all he flung her constancy in her face, told her that she had been a clog upon his actions, the cause of all his failures. That last insult had broken her heart. And now, in these long and lonely days, uncheered by friendship, unsustained by religion, amidst foulest surroundings, in pain and penury, Pâquerette's memory went back to her married life, to the peaceful, gracious home she had abandoned, and to the husband who had been all goodness and all indulgence for her, and whose only fault had been to work over-hard for the future which they two were to share together. Ah, what a happy life it seemed, her life on that second floor at Ménilmontant looked back upon from her den in the City of the Sun! She had not known a care in those days. Her nest had been soft and warm, her purse well filled. And now, alas! the story of the prodigal son was recalled to her as she thought that Ishmael's dog had better fare than the mouldy crusts or the rancid broth which was offered to her dry lips by the grandmother's charity.

And for her there was no possibility of return. She could not go back like the prodigal son, and confess her sorrow for her sin. Her sin was of a kind which sets an everlasting barrier between the sinner and the offended one. God would forgive her, perhaps. Her Creator and her Judge would accept this long penance in sackcloth and ashes; but Ishmael could not pardon. For what motive had she sinned against him? For a fancy, for a dream, for the impulse of an idle mind. Looked back upon now in her misery, that sin seemed as motiveless as it had proved fatal.

Memory travelled back to even earlier days—to that joyous holiday under green leaves, that midsummer day in the woods

of Marly. She had loved Ishmael then, looking up at him as to a being of superior mould, adoring him with innocent girlish worship, as pure of soul in her dingy ground-floor den as the most high-bred damsel in the Faubourg Saint-Germain just emerged from conventual seclusion. The snowdrop in the workman's window unfolds itself from its green sheaf as fair a blossom as the tuber-rose in a duchess's conservatory. The taint and the grime come later to the open flower. Yes, Pâquerette had been pure in those days, and had given Ishmael a holy and an innocent love. And Fate had smiled upon her as it smiles on few of her class; and she had won a good and true man for her husband. And then came a life too free from care, days too easy, idleness that corrupts the soul; and for a frivolous fancy she gave her life to shame and dishonour.

She had leisure enough in which to trace the progress of her folly as she lay staring up at the sky, her only prospect, or watching the green tops of the sunflowers grow taller as the days went by, only token of the passage of time except the racking cough and the sharp pain in her side, which grew a little worse every day. And, oh, the bitterness of those keen regrets, the dull agony of remorseful memories which travelled again and again over the same ground! Only the sinner who has lost all because of one irreparable act knows the sharpness of such a repentance.

In those long blank days Pâquerette's fine ear grew accustomed to every sound in the City of the Sun—unmelodious, harsh, discordant sounds, for the most part, which were a pain to that delicate sense of hearing; the grunting of pigs; the shrill yells and evil language of the gutter-brood, sprawling and squabbling in the sunshine and the dirt, children only a little higher than the animals they played with and fought with; the yelping of dogs; the crowing and cackling of a ragged regiment of fowls; the grating sound of a hurdy-gurdy, the treble piping of a tin-whistle; the still harsher sounds of human quarrelling, which seemed always at a pitch of acrimony that touched the edge of murder.

There were two or three itinerant musicians among the dwellers in the sunflower city, and of these the best known to Pâquerette were a pair of Italian organ-grinders, who inhabited the den next Mère Lemoine's dwelling. The rotten partitions were so thin, that Pâquerette could hear every tone of their voices—nay, could sometimes hear their very words, though she was rarely able to understand more than a sentence here and there. This was not because they spoke Italian, for in the course of her Southern wanderings Pâquerette had learned a good

deal of Italian, and a little Spanish; but because they, for the most part, spoke in a Neapolitan *patois* curiously interlarded with the newest Parisian slang.

Sometimes, of a summer evening, after Mère Lemoine had gone out with her basket and her lantern, the two Italians would rest themselves after their labours on a bench in front of their den, smoking and talking in the twilight while their macaroni was simmering on the hearth inside, sending forth savoury odours of cheese and garlic. And at these times Pâquerette could hear every word they said. Unseen as they were, they were her only companions. She became interested in them from the very desolation of her lonely life. They were two human voices near her. She envied them each other's company. They seemed to be kind to each other, brotherly. It was pleasanter to hear them than the grunting of pigs, the howl of a half-starved cur. Their Italian voices had a low, rich sound as of music. Little by little her keen intelligence got to understand their *patois*, and she could follow almost every word they said.

They were keen politicians, talked much of France and of Italy, of secret societies, and of one great society, which was to bind together the working classes all over the civilised world—a brotherhood before which kings and crowns were to go down, and palaces to crumble or be turned into Phalansteries. They talked of the Carbonari; or Orsini, and his attempt upon the life of the Emperor; and how Napoleon visited him in his cell at Mazas upon the eve of his execution, and swore to liberate Italy from the yoke.

'It was well for him that he kept his promise,' said the elder brother, 'for there are forty of the Carbonari who took a solemn oath to slay him if he delayed the redemption of the pledges he gave in his youth. But now he is with us. He, who a few years ago condemned a handful of students for holding a political meeting, now encourages the International with heart and hand.'

'Every tradesman must go with the times,' answered the other, with sardonic air—'the man who trades in kingdoms and sceptres most of all.'

'And now the Emperor is going to help working-men to insure their lives, to leave something after death for the wife and little ones, and to make a fund against accident or illness. The State is to find part of the money. The workman is to pay his modicum.'

The other laughed aloud at this ideal of prudence and economy.

'How many of those model workmen are there, do you think, who care what becomes of their brood when they are

lying in their gratis trench? If they have any spare cash, it goes to the *assommoir*, or the *bastringue*. What we want is something more than to be helped to save our own money. We want to bring down masters to the level of their men; we want a fair division of profits instead of starvation wages. What we want is co-operative labour: co-operation between workmen which should put an end to the patron; co-operation between the workman and the State which should do away with the middle-man. We want to see the last of those harpies, the army-contractors, for example, who sweat their gold out of the brows of their journeymen. Let the Government give out their materials to a syndicate of workmen, who will return the finished articles at the bare cost of the labour employed upon them. No intermediary between the country that pays and the labourer who works. But, no; the Government would rather encourage the slave-dealer, the man who grinds the faces of the poor. I say, that no man has the right to grow rich by another man's labour; and the great capitalist who employs a thousand labourers is as vile a cheat as the Padrone you and I have had to deal with, who grows rich out of half a hundred barrel-organs and as many white slaves to grind them.'

'I know of such a one,' growled the other; 'a man who used to dine at a seven-sous *ordinaire* sixteen years ago. I have sat beside him many a time. He was a labourer, a mason's drudge, in those days; and now he is a great man; builds bridges, viaducts, railways; and is one of the millionaires of Paris. This Monsieur Ishmael used to be a voice among the Reds; he was a great man among us in the old days, when we were called the *Société de la Loque*, and used to meet in a back room at Villette; but he has changed his tune since he has grown rich. They all change from the day they can manage to scrape together two or three thousand francs.'

'*Grace à Dieu*, I have never let myself be corrupted by saving money,' said the easy-tempered younger brother; 'when I have two or three sous, I change them for a glass of *pétrole*, which warms blood and brain, instead of cooling them, as money does.'

'I have known the want of money heat a man's blood to fever-point, to murder,' said Gavot, the elder.

'True,' replied the younger, with a lazy yawn. 'But so long as I have a handful of macaroni in the pot and a shelter from the storm, I can make myself happy.'

'I am not of your temper. I hate poverty, and I hate rich men. Ishmael has been a marked man for the last three years. Let him beware. The Prolos do not forgive renegades.'

This was the first time Pâquerette heard her husband's name mentioned by the Neapolitans. After this she took a still keener interest in their conversation, and was always listening for that one name, or for any allusion to Ishmael. She heard them speak of him on several occasions, heard them talk of his successes, his wealth with just the same keen envy that she had heard expressed by Hector de Valnois many a time upon the same subject; for that hatred which the loser feels for the winner in the race of life is a common weakness of poor humanity, exemplified on a large scale, say, by the hatred which Prussia felt for France from the day of her defeat at Jena to the day of her revenge at Sedan, and on a lower level by the detestation of an insolvent baker for his prosperous rival in the same street.

Hector de Valnois, gentleman, poet, sybarite, had hated the self-made man for his victory over fortune; and from the lips of this organ-grinder, who had known Ishmael in his early struggles, Pâquerette heard the same droppings of venomed speech.

One night the two brothers—they who were, for the most part, so brotherly—quarrelled in their cups. Pâquerette heard them, and shuddered, discovering for the first time how terrible the wrath of these Southern natures can be. They seemed to be on the point of killing each other. She heard them struggle, guessed from their speech that knives were brandished, and that blood was shed. She held her breath, expecting every moment to hear the death-groan. But the noise of the scuffle grew fainter, and died into silence. And next morning the two men went out with their organs, singing gaily, fast friends and good brothers.

And now, in the lurid August sunset, they were sitting outside her door, smoking their pipes and talking of Ishmael; talking in low and muttered tones, so that Pâquerette could only catch a word here and there.

This had gone on for some time, and then Gavot, the man who claimed old acquaintance with Ishmael, raised his voice, and said, in an angry tone:

'He refused me fifty francs—he—on the eve of his wedding with a wealthy Englishwoman, a marriage that will double his fortune, they say—refused fifty francs to an old acquaintance—a brother of the *Société de la Loque*. There was a day when, if I had denounced him as a member of that secret society, he would have been sent to Cayenne, as those others were after the *coup d'état*. If I were to denounce him now, it might be the worse for him—renegade—turncoat as he is. He refused

me a handful of francs—refused help to an old fellow-workman: referred me to some benevolent society he has founded. I know them, those benevolent societies. They are invented to ask questions and pry into a poor man's affairs rather than to give him a dinner or a bed. And he is to be married to-morrow to an English lady—*une jeune Mees Lady Constance quelque-chose;* a grand marriage at the church of St. Philippe du Roule. Perhaps he may have more guests at his wedding than he has counted upon.'

He was to be married to-morrow. Pâquerette covered her face with her wasted hands, and the tears flowed fast between the transparent fingers.

'He might have waited till I was *quite* dead; it would not have been long,' she said to herself. 'And yet, what difference can it make? I have been dead to him for years!'

They went on talking out there in the red, angry glow of the sinking sun. Pâquerette heard the drone of their voices, now loud, now low; but she listened no more to their words. She lay with her eyes shut, thinking of Ishmael. He was to be married to-morrow to a grand English lady—a woman worthy of his love. And she, Pâquerette, would be blotted for ever out of his life. Did he believe that she was dead, she wondered. Yes; it must be so. He was too honourable to marry if he thought she were living. Some one must have deceived him; some one must have told him she was dead.

'It can make very little difference since I shall be dead so soon!' she thought. She had never hoped to be forgiven by him, never hoped to see him again. She had thought of him for years as of one who must needs scorn and loathe her. And yet, it was almost as great a pain to know that he was to be married to another as if they two had clasped hands only yesterday, and the bond of love were but newly snapped asunder. She could think of nothing but of this marriage. She tried to picture the face of the bride; but she could only call up a vague image of a handsome countenance, cold and cruel, looking upon her with infinite scorn. And then she pictured Ishmael kneeling at that cold, proud woman's feet, adoring her, happy with her. And it seemed as if she, Pâquerette, had never truly lost him until now.

Gradually, imperceptibly, while summer darkness descended upon the City of the Sun, the waking picture changed to the fever-visions of a troubled sleep. Pâquerette was standing in a church, such a church as waking eye has never seen—so vast, so strange, so devilish in its hues of vivid carmine and glittering gold, like the flames of Pandemonium. And in slow procession

towards the high altar came Ishmael and his bride, the English beauty, clad in white velvet and diamonds, like the Empress on her wedding-day; and for the bridal company followed all the rag-pickers of Paris, with their loaded baskets and their swinging lanterns, two and two, a fantastic train. The stench of the baskets, the smoke of the lanterns, stifled Pâquerette. She woke with a sense of suffocation—woke to hear loud and angry voices in the adjacent den, and to feel rather than to know that she had slept long, and that it was the dead of the night.

They were not fighting this time. Those voices were raised in angry denunciation of some one or of something; hoarse, thickened by strong drink, confused, almost unintelligible; but there was no quarrel. There was a third voice, which spoke in Parisian French, interlarded with the slang which custom had made familiar to Pâquerette from her childhood. She had known the slang of workmen and *grisettes*, of actresses and singers, of journalists, and poets, and painters, and freethinkers, and Socialists. And the man who was talking to the two Neapolitans in the adjoining shed spoke that language of which she had heard most of late, the figurative speech of the students' quarter, a vocabulary full of subtle allusions, almost every word charged with a history. The voice, too, had a familiar sound, but her weary brain could not recall where she had heard it.

The Italians had been drinking, and were half mad with drink. The elder Gavot vowed vengeance upon an old enemy. The Frenchman pretended to deprecate his wrath, obviously egging him on all the time. Pâquerette crept across the floor, and seated herself close to the partition. She sat with her ear against the rotten planks. The wood served as a conductor of sound. She could hear every syllable. Gavot's talk was incoherent, diffuse, rambling; the stranger's words were every one to the purpose. He came back always to the same point. He, in his own person, bore no grudge against this man Ishmael. But as a Prolo, as a member of that older Society of the Loque, as one of the great brotherhood of humanity, he revolted against the tyranny of capital, against a man who, after absorbing the labour and the brains of other men with the octopus arms of a hundred audacious speculations, could refuse fifty francs to his fellow-man, his companion of the past. Gavot told that story of the fifty francs again and again over his cups; he beat it out like red-hot iron upon the anvil, and at every repetition the fiery sparks flew faster, until the man had maddened himself almost as much by his own words as by the liquid fire from the nearest wine-shop.

The talk lasted long, with infinite reiteration, accompanied at brief intervals by the chink of glasses and the sound of liquor being poured from a bottle.

And at last, when the cold dawn, with its look of unearthly brightness, was staring in at the open window, Pâquerette, pale as a spectre in that livid light, sat with wide-open eyes, listening to Gavot's vow of vengeance on the traitor to the cause of Socialism.

He would be there at the church door with his knife. There was a deed to be done as worthy as the slaughter of Cæsar, as heroic as the assassination of Marat—a deed that should make France ring with the name of the doer.

'I was one of the forty Carbonari who swore to kill Napoleon the Third if he broke faith with the liberators of Italy,' said Gavot. 'There were princes and nobles among them; but there were men of the people also, and I was one of those. I would have killed the Emperor had he turned renegade. Where Orsini failed I should have succeeded, for I would have been bolder. And I will stab this renegade to-morrow at the church door.'

## CHAPTER XL

### 'AND A STORMY WIND SHALL REND IT'

IT was Ishmael's wedding morning, the morning which was to begin a new and glorious life—a life glorified by such a love as men dream of in the fervour and faith of youth's imaginings, but which few are so blessed as to realise in after life. Ishmael was one of those chosen few. His childhood had been spent in neglect and dishonour; his loveless boyhood had been embittered by a stepmother's jealousy; the cup of disappointment had been given him to drink in his early manhood; his married life had brought him only evil and shame in return for patient kindness and honest affection upon his part; but now, when the race for wealth had been run victoriously, when honour and renown had been acquired as the crowning grace of fortune—now, in the prime and vigour of his manhood, he was to realise that dream of bliss which every true man cherishes—the vision of union with a loftier soul than his own, of being able to pour out the treasures of his love at the feet of a woman who, for him at least, should be half a goddess.

Overpowered, bewildered almost by his supreme content, he paced his study in the Place Royale in the fresh summer morning, the soft south wind blowing in upon him from the grave old square, with its blossoming limes and its kingly statue, solemn, tranquil, remote from the stir and tumult of the great city. He had been at work at yonder desk for the greater part of the night. His lamps had not been extinguished till sunrise, and then he had only lain down for two or three hours' sleep before rising again for his cold bath and his toilet. A coffee-pot and a light breakfast of rolls stood on a table by the open window. The big office table was covered with papers, classified, arranged, to be ready for his secretary and his clerks during his absence. He was to start that evening upon a long honeymoon; first to Pen-Hoël, to show his wife the cradle of his race; then all through Brittany; and afterwards to the South of Ireland. He wanted to see that fair and fertile land in which Constance's childhood and girlhood had been spent, a province as romantic and unique as his own rustic Brittany. They two had planned that honeymoon holiday stage by stage. Each was to show the other the haunts of childhood and youth. It would bring them

even nearer together, strengthen just a little the perfect bond of sympathy, to tread the old pathway side by side, to recall for each other the beginning of either life.

On their return to Paris, Lady Constance's villa in the Bois de Boulogne was to be their wedded home, while the good old house in the Place Royale was to remain Ishmael's office. His working life was to be in no wise altered by his marriage. He was still to be one of the master-spirits of an age of progress. Viaducts, railways, roads, canals, were to be continued as if no revolution had changed the life of the engineer. Constance had never sought to beguile her lover into the sybarite's empty existence, to transform the worker into the man of society. 'You will give me as much of your company always as you can, Sébastien,' she said; 'and I promise not to be jealous of your work.'

'My dearest, the happiness of my days will be with you, and the hour that you tell me you are tired of a working man for a husband, I will begin to wind up my business life, so as to be your slave, and yours only.'

'I shall not do that until I feel that you have come to the time of life when a man should rest from his labours,' she answered, gravely; 'when the grinding of the great wheel should cease, and a man may sit by his hearth and say, "My work is done." I can look forward with content and hopefulness now to old age, Sébastien, for it will be the holiday of our wedded lives. And before I knew you, I used to think of my declining years with a shudder, as a time of loneliness and regret.'

After this they talked of that far-off future, the day of repose from life's conflict and labour; and planned how they would live sometimes in the old house at Pen-Hoël, which was to be improved into the very perfection of a rustic manor-house; sometimes in a dower-house on the banks of the Shannon, which Constance had inherited from her mother. Some part of every year was to be spent in Paris, for neither Constance nor Ishmael could conceive the possibility of an old age in which contact with their fellow-men could cease to be a necessity of their lives. They had planned everything in those fond forecastings of wedded life which lovers delight in. Their days and years were laid out as a garden, a garden in which there should be neither weed, nor thorn, thistle nor bramble of temper, jealousy, ill-will, or discontent; only the fairest flowers of love and mutual bliss.

And now Ishmael walked slowly up and down, and in and out of the suite of spacious rooms on the first floor in the fine

old panelled house, built in the days of the second Bourbon King, and mused upon the life he was leaving, the life upon which he was entering. The life which was to end to-day had been a desolate life—rich in fortune, in success, in honour, but barren of domestic joys, passing poor in love. These old walls had looked, with their sombre colouring of years long gone, upon lonely hours, days and nights given to driest work ; and only once in a way had they beheld a social gathering, a bachelor's dinner of four or five earnest men, all workers like the host. For nine years, ever since the beginning of his wealth, Ishmael had occupied that first floor in the Place Royale. The quiet old square, with its shadowy trees, the sober old-panelled rooms, had taken his fancy. It was just such a sombre and retired home for which his wounded heart languished. He took to himself a clever old housekeeper, a woman who, for seven-and-twenty years, had kept house for one of the greatest *savants* of France, a woman who knew how to respect an isolated studious life, and how to provide for the comfort of a master who had no idea of caring for himself. With such a servant Ishmael's domestic life had gone upon velvet ; but if it had been without trouble, it had also been a stranger to joy.

As he looked round the rooms to-day in the light of his new happiness, he wondered how he could have endured that loneliness so long : a life without domestic love. Ah ! how long the days and nights seemed to look back upon : monotonous days and evenings in which there had been no variety but the variety of labour and care. Those dark panels had reflected his lamps night after night till the edge of morning, and had seen him bending over the same desk on the wide table spread with maps and plans, and estimates and calculations of quantities, in the same attitude, hour after hour.

The adjoining room, across which he paced this morning, needing all the space possible for the expansion of his glad thoughts, was his *salon* and dining-room in one. He had furnished it with the solid old rosewood bureau, the massive chairs and tables from his old home at Ménilmontant, even the black marble clock with the bronze sphinxes which had sounded so many weary hours for Pâquerette's impatient fancy, eager for pleasure and excitement, in a city where the fever of dissipation seemed in the very air men breathed. There were the old things, vividly recalling the old life on the threshold of the new. There, in a recess by the fireplace, stood Pâquerette's piano. Poor little piano ! In his anguish and rage at his wife's dishonour, Ishmael's first impulse had been to smash the thing, to break it up for firewood, burn it to ashes ;

but, with his axe uplifted for the work of destruction, he had relented. The strings vibrated with a mournful sound as he waved his hatchet in the air, a minor wail like a cry of despair. It was as if it were a living thing he was about to slay—a roe caught in the thicket. No ; he could not hurt the poor little piano. He kept it by his fireside, though to look at it was always pain, so vividly did it recall Pâquerette. And many a time between midnight and early morning he had risen, wearied, half-blinded by pouring over figures and plans, and had seated himself at this little piano to pick out old tunes, simple melodies by Grétry or Mozart, with his clumsy, uneducated fingers.

The old piano, part of his domestic sorrow, was to be undisturbed by his new joy. Lady Constance had looked at it curiously on her first and only visit to her lover's home. She had driven there with Amélie Jarzé, one afternoon, to see what a house in the Place Royale was like. At least, that was the motive put forward when she proposed the visit to Ishmael, though, perhaps, the real desire was to see the background of her lover's daily life.

The piano caught her eye before she had been two minutes in the room.

'What, you play, then ?' she exclaimed.

'So badly, that it is hardly to be called playing,' he answered reddening a little.

'Yet well enough to have a piano in your room.'

'It is a relief to me sometimes to stumble through an old melody when I am very tired of dry-as-dust work.'

'I am sure you play well, and I am enchanted at the idea, cried Constance. 'Do play something for me.'

Ishmael declined the honour, smiling at her eagerness.

'Either of your footmen would play as well as I.'

'And yet you—a serious business man, a famous engineer—have a piano in your *salon !*'

'Why not ? The piano was a fancy of mine. Is a working man to have no fancies ?'

'Your piano has such a very feminine look,' said Amélie, full of curiosity. 'And here is an old music-book,' she said, standing by the piano and twirling over a volume ; 'an opera of Grétry's, with some of the soprano songs scribbled all over with a master's instructions. Your sister's book, no doubt ?'

'No, Mademoiselle : I never had a sister. That book belonged to a person who was no relation to me.'

This was strictly true. The volume was a second-hand one, picked up at a bookstall by Lisette Moque, lent by her to Pâquerette, who learnt some of the songs with her old singing

master, and never returned the volume to its owner. It had been moved among other books from the third floor at Ménilmontant to the first floor in the Place Royale.

Amélie recurred more than once to that little incident of the piano and music book in her after conversations with Lady Constance Danetree, but she failed in kindling a spark of jealousy in Constance's steadfast mind. Her love was supreme in all noble qualities, most of all in faith.

The contract, which secured to Constance the whole of her fortune, and gave her a magnificent settlement on the part of Sébastien de Caradec—otherwise Ishmael—had been executed over night. The civil marriage was to be performed at eleven o'clock; the religious ceremonial at twelve. Fashion among people of Constance Danetree's rank prescribed that the civil marriage should take place on one day, the religious ceremonial the day after; but Constance cared nothing for fashions and conventionalities, and she and Ishmael had been of one mind in preferring that both ceremonies should be performed within a couple of hours, leaving them free to hurry away from the tumult and glare of Paris at the earliest opportunity.

It was to be a very quiet marriage. Only Constance Danetree's chosen friends and three old friends and associates of the bridegroom had been invited.

Ishmael's three friends were men of considerable distinction in their various callings: one a practical engineer like himself, a man whose inventions and improvements had increased the wealth and well-being of his country; another, a well-known physician; the third, a *savant* and a man of letters. Ishmael's idea of friendship was quality rather than quantity. In his seventeen years of Parisian life he had made many acquaintances; but he could count his friends upon the fingers of one hand.

At a quarter before eleven he was at the Mairie, attended by these three friends of his, waiting for his bride. At five minutes before the hour Constance arrived, accompanied by her old friend, Lady Valentine, who had known her from girlhood, and her new friends, Hortense and Amélie Jarzé, who, by sheer persistence, had contrived to interweave themselves in the woof of her life. And certainly Amélie was no disgrace to the ceremonial. Her bright golden hair was set off by the daintiest little bonnet, all rosebuds and lilies of the valley. Her white muslin frock was a flutter of lace flounces and palest pink ribbon; her gloves and parasol were of the same delicate pink. Not an article of her toilette was paid for, nor was likely to be paid for within a reasonable period. But the *couturière* had

been more amiable to Lady Constance Danetree's particular friend than she would have been to Monsieur Jarzé's impecunious daughter. Amélie had taken her dear friend to Madame Volant's luxurious rooms in the Rue de la Paix, and, with a little dexterous management, had induced her dear friend to lay out five or six thousand francs upon Madame Volant's novelties—a gown exactly like that just made for the Countess Walewska, a mantle like one ordered yesterday for the Empress. On the strength of Lady Constance's purchases, Amélie had ordered her frock and bonnet for the wedding; and albeit she was to assist at the consummation of her own defeat, she was bent on looking her prettiest upon this particular morning. Monsieur de Kératry was to be at the church; and their betrothal was now an established fact. It was only a question how soon his circumstances would authorise marriage; and if not rich, he was at least noble, good-looking, clever; and Amélie thought herself much better off than Hortense, yonder, with her pale, pinched face and anxious eyes, and her hopeless passion for that poor little impostor, Paul de Pontchartrain.

Constance looked as shy as a girl of eighteen as she came slowly towards the table, behind which sat the Maire in his tricoloured scarf, the awful functionary whose sign-manual was to make her Sébastien's wife. Her gown and bonnet of cream-coloured *crêpe de chine* were simplicity itself. What need of fine gowns and bonnets to express happiness? *That* shone and sparkled in the lovely violet eyes, luminous under their long dark lashes, which drooped a little more than usual this morning. She gave her hand to Ishmael when the brief ceremony was over, and he led her out to her carriage.

'Now I am half your wife,' she said, smiling at him. 'It is already too late for repentance. The thing cannot be undone. Oh, what a stormy sky! And I hoped the sun would smile upon our union.'

'The sunshine is in our hearts, my beloved,' he whispered.

The storm-clouds which had been darkening the sky at intervals ever since yesterday's sunset now brooded black and heavy over the golden dome of the Invalides, and the leaden sky made a sombre background behind the Marly Horses in the Champs-Elysées, where not a leaf of the blossoming limes stirred in the heavy atmosphere. Weather can make no difference to a man whose whole being is steeped in gladness, before whose eager feet the gates of Paradise are opening; and yet Ishmael felt a vague sense of oppression, a nameless foreshadowing of evil, as his brougham drove along the Rue du Faubourg St. Honoré under the splashing of heavy rain-drops.

There was a rumble of distant thunder as he alighted hastily in front of the church, anxious to be ready to receive his wife, whose carriage followed.

There was an awning before the church door, and a crowd under the awning—the usual cluster of shabbily-clad idlers: men, women, and children, curious about every movement in that world of the wealthy and high-born, which was as remote from their own world as if it were in another planet. The crowd was rather bigger than it usually is on such occasions, for Ishmael had given *carte blanche* to a florist in the Rue Castiglione, and the altar was more exquisitely decorated than for an ordinary wedding. The carrying in of the flowers had been a sufficient sign of something out of the common; and the crowd had been growing ever since ten o'clock.

Ishmael's brougham had scarcely driven away when the other carriages approached. He had no time to look at the faces in the crowd before Constance had alighted. In another moment her hand was through his arm, and they two were on the threshold of the church together.

Before they had passed that threshold, there was a sudden movement in the crowd, a shriek of fear from Constance, as a man broke through the throng, and sprang upon Ishmael with a dagger in his hand, uplifted to strike.

Rapid, decisive as that movement was, it was not so quick as that of a pale, forlorn creature in the front row—a sickly face and a feeble figure, that had been leaning for the last half-hour, faint and weary, against the moulding of the church door, the shabbiest, wretchedest figure in that mixed assembly. Swift as was the hand with the dagger, the white-faced woman intercepted the blow. She flung herself upon Ishmael's breast as the assassin's arm descended; and it was her shoulder that received the knife meant for his heart.

The wound was severe, but not fatal. Pâquerette lifted her wan eyes to her husband's face.

'I have saved your life,' she murmured, faintly. 'God is very good to let me do it.'

'Pâquerette!'

'You know her, then!' faltered Constance, clinging to him, envious of this pale, squalid creature who had saved the man she, Constance Danetree, loved, and would have died to shield from harm.

'Know her! yes, too well, too well. Where are we to take her? What are we to do for her?' he asked, looking at Dr. Dureau, his medical friend.

The Italian had been seized, was in the grip of the police instantly as it seemed to the spectators.

'Take her to the hospital,' said Dureau, taking Pâquerette in his arms and looking at the ghastly face. 'That is about all you can do for her. The blade has pierced the pleura if it has not touched her lungs. It is a bad case. Is there any surgeon in the crowd?'

There was none as it seemed, so Dr. Dureau despatched a messenger for one of the cleverest surgeons in Paris, who lived near at hand.

'Not to the hospital,' said Ishmael, hurriedly; 'to my house. She has saved my life.'

'A decided obligation if it was not an accident,' answered the physician. 'But I think the hospital would be better.'

'No, no; to my house. You can take her there in my carriage. Dureau, I depend upon you to do all—all that can be done for her. Loraine,' to his friend, the *savant*, 'give Lady Constance your arm to take her into the church. I will rejoin you presently.'

'You will not be long?' said Constance, deadly pale, but calm and collected, as it was her nature to be in a crisis.

Her friends, Lady Valentine, Hortense, Amélie, crowded about her, suffocated her almost with their attentions.

'Pray let me alone!' she exclaimed, impatiently. '*I* have not been stabbed.'

She walked up the nave between the crowded chairs, the staring, gaping spectators, in an atmosphere heavy with incense and hothouse flowers. She walked with a firm footstep, her head carried as proudly as ever, but her heart beating passionately, full of tumult and fear.

What did it all mean? There was a mystery somewhere, a history of the past in which that white, wan creature was involved. Women do not fling themselves between the victim and the knife without a motive stronger than abstract benevolence. This woman had saved Sébastien Caradec's life most likely at the cost of her own. A woman does not do as much as that for the first comer.

This act of to-day was the last link in a chain, and it was for Ishmael to enlighten her as to all the other links before they two should kneel side by side at yonder altar.

She was his wife already. Yes, by the law of the land; but not by the sacrament of the church. She, a Roman Catholic, counted that legal ceremonial as of smallest importance. In her own mind, the union of to-day was no union till the Church had sanctioned and sanctified it.

She seated herself a little way from the embroidered carpet upon which they were to kneel. The tapers were burning amidst clusters of waxen bloom, stephanotis, Cape jasmine, tuber-roses. The altar was one brilliant mass of gold, and flame, and colour. She sat there with her eyes fixed, seeing neither tapers nor flowers; seeing only the woman's livid face lying on Ishmael's bosom.

He of whom she thought was busy in assisting at the departure of the carriage with the wounded, and perhaps dying, woman. The surgeon had come in answer to Dr. Dureau's summons; cushions were brought from the church and arranged in the carriage, so that Pâquerette could be conveyed to the Place Royale in a reclining position. Ishmael scribbled a pencil note to his housekeeper requesting her to do all that the utmost care could do for the patient. The carriage was to call for a nursing Sister on its way through the Marais. Everything was planned rapidly, decisively, for Pâquerette's comfort. She seemed only half conscious when they laid her in the carriage. Just at the last moment Ishmael bent down and kissed her cold hand.

'I thank you, Pâquerette,' he murmured, and the white lips answered with a feeble smile.

'And now,' said Dr. Dureau, when Ishmael's carriage had driven off, with the surgeon seated by Pâquerette's side, and all arrangements made for her comfort, present and future, 'I think you had better go and perform the second act of your wedding drama.'

'Not to-day,' said Ishmael: 'I could not—Lady Constance would not wish—'

'I think Lady Constance will wish to make as little of a scandal out of this business as possible,' replied his friend. 'The fact that an Italian fanatic attempted your life and that a beggar-woman saved it is no reason why your marriage should not take place to day.'

'But there is a reason,' said Ishmael. 'There can be no marriage to-day. I must see Lady Constance alone.'

Dr. Dureau shrugged his shoulders.

'You are the hero of the play, and you must finish it in your own fashion,' he said. 'It was near ending in a tragedy fifteen minutes ago. What motive could that man have for attacking you?'

'None but his own ill-will to one who never injured him. He is a member of a secret society to which I have belonged for many years—a Socialist, a carbonaro—what you will. He came whining and begging to me the day before yesterday.

They all do, these acquaintances of my poverty, though they denounce me for having grown rich. I refused to give him money, referred him to a benevolent institution with which I am connected, and which relieves the deserving.'

'You say you never injured him! and you refused him money yesterday! as if that were not the deadliest injury. A Parisian would write a libellous paragraph about you. A Neapolitan rushes at you with his knife.'

Ishmael went up the nave to the space in front of the altar where the wedding party was grouped, Constance seated in the midst, very pale, but with a superb repose of attitude and manner, as if nothing extraordinary had happened. The wedding guests had a more fluttered air, expectant, excited. The organ was playing Beethoven's 'Hallelujah Chorus' from the *Mount of Olives*. Priests and acolytes were waiting.

'Lady Constance, may I speak with you for a few minutes in the vestry?' asked Ishmael.

Constance rose, and went with him towards the vestry door.

'It is what I have been wishing for,' she said, as they entered the room, which was empty. 'This ceremony of to-day can go no further till you have explained the mystery of that woman's devotion.'

Ishmael closed the door, and stood with his back against it, facing Constance, deadly pale, but with no touch of the craven in his aspect.

'Alas! my beloved,' he said, 'this marriage of ours can go no further to-day—nor for many days—perhaps never, unless you are very kind and pitiful to me. There is no mystery. There is only a terrible surprise. The woman who threw herself between me and that man's dagger is my wife. She is the wife who abandoned me thirteen years ago, and of whose death I was assured. I had ample evidence. Not till I had conclusive evidence of her death did I ask you to marry me. That was why I held back in the first instance, waiting for certainty. Well, I was duped by a scoundrel, whom I paid for duping me. The evidence of my wife's death which was given me was a fabrication. That is all. And my unhappy wife still lives!'

There was a silence. Constance looked at him with sad, reproachful eyes. Her lips trembled a little before she could find words, and then she said, falteringly:

'You might have told me everything. You might have trusted me as I trusted you.'

'You had no dark story in your past life—no plague-spot. I shrank from talking to you of my first marriage. I was only one-and-twenty years of age when I married a foolish girl, low-

born, ignorant, reared in the gutter; a girl who might have been at least respectable as my wife, but who chose another fate. And now, at the last, after thirteen years, in which she has given me not one sign of her existence, she rises up at my feet out of the stones of Paris, and sacrifices her own life to save mine.'

'So long as she lives you are bound to her. Whether it be for months or for years, you owe her the devotion of your life,' said Constance, with intense conviction. 'Whatever her guilt may have been in the past, her sacrifice of to-day is an atonement.'

'How she came to be there at the moment of peril: whether it was accident, or if she knew—it is all a mystery,' said Ishmael.

'She will explain all—if she recover.'

'Constance—I call you by that dear name, perhaps for the last time—can you forgive me? Will you believe that I am guiltless in this miserable entanglement?'

'I have always believed you,' she answered, with a queenly smile. 'And now take me back to my carriage. Let nobody suppose that we are ill friends.'

They went back to the nave together. Ishmael explained that, under the agitating circumstances of this morning, Lady Constance and he had decided to postpone the marriage ceremony. He felt it his duty to look after the poor creature who had jeopardized her life to save him. He might also be wanted at the examination of his would-be assassin before the *juge d'instruction*.

Lady Constance invited her friends to the breakfast which had been prepared for them, but all had the grace to decline. Only Lady Valentine offered to accompany her old friend home; but Constance owned that she would rather be alone.

'I shall get over the morning's agitation better by myself,' she said; and the carriage drove off with her alone, Ishmael standing bare-headed to watch her depart.

And so ended his wedding day—the day which was to have begun a new life. Three hours later they two were to have been seated side by side in a railway carriage—a *coupé* specially retained yesterday in advance—on their way to Pen-Hoël.

Some one touched him on the arm. It was an official, who requested him to go at once to the office of the *juge d'instruction*, before whom Gavot was about to be examined. Dr. Dureau and Ishmael's two other friends, both witnesses of the attempt, were also wanted.

## CHAPTER XLI

### 'THE MORNING IS COME UNTO THEE'

THE Venetian shutters were half-closed upon the open windows of the old panelled room in the Place Royale. A sober old room, soberly furnished, cool and airy even in this sultry August weather. The faint rustle of leaves, the measured tread of occasional footsteps sounded in the grave old square outside. Tranquillest corner of Paris, remote from the traffic and the din, meet home for poet and philosopher; and, oh, what a blessed change from the City of the Sun! What an earthly Paradise after that hell upon earth!

Pâquerette was lying on her soft white bed in the roomy alcove yonder, under finest linen, perfumed with roses and lavender, screened by cool draperies of soft gray damask. Pâquerette was resting luxuriously on the last stage of a journey which had grown trauquil and pleasant as it drew to its close. She lay propped up by large white pillows, scarce whiter even in their fresh purity than the thin, pinched face looking out of them. Her pale, transparent hand toyed idly with a large bunch of Dijon roses that lay upon the coverlet. There were flowers on the mantelpiece, flowers on the table near the bed, flowers on the wiudow-sill—a luxury of flowers.

A Sister of the order of St. Vincent de Paul sat a little way from the alcove, and watched the patient, ready to minister to the smallest wish. She could do little more than smooth that steep descent to darkness and the grave. Pâquerette was dying. She had been dying by inches in her den in the City of the Sun, and now death was coming towards her with swifter footsteps—now, when she was at peace in that soft, sweet bed, amidst the scent of roses, with the afternoon light making bars of gold upon the polished oak floor, between the Venetian shutters. Beyond those half-closed shutters she saw green leaves and the blue sky. No grunting and squeaking of swine, no yapping of mangy curs assailed her ear; no fœtid odours sickened her.

She was at peace; her sins were confessed and forgiven. A good old priest from Ishmael's native village had come to her bedside as fast as diligence and railway could bring him.

Ishmael had telegraphed for him within an hour of the scene at the church door. Good old Father Bressant had knelt by her bed, had heard her faltered expression of deepest penitence, and had given her such comfort as the Church can give to the remorseful sinner.

And then he whose face she dreaded, yet loved to look upon, had come and sat beside her pillow, and had taken her pale, wasted hand in his strong grasp, and had given her pardon for the bitter irrevocable past, for the one mad act which had blighted two lives. Very tenderly had he acknowledged the love that had come between him and murder; and they two had prayed together, recalling the fond, sad memory of the child they had lost, the prayers said beside the little coffin, the grave on the side of the hill.

'Let me be buried with my baby,' she pleaded, 'if—if—other people have not taken the grave for their dead.'

'Pâquerette, do you think I should forget my child's resting-place? That was the first freehold I ever bought.'

'And you will let me be buried there?'

'The mother shall rest beside her child.'

'Bless you for that promise, Ishmael. I have only one other prayer. The poor old grandmother—so old, so wretched, so feeble, leading such a miserable life; bent, and weary, and half blind, and yet toiling on—will you save her from that horrible life, remove her from that hideous place where the rag-pickers herd together in the dirt like animals? Will you do that, Ishmael, for——?' She was going to say 'for my sake,' but she stopped herself, and faltered humbly, 'for the sake of what I once was to you.'

'The poor old grandmother shall be cared for. I would do much more than that for your sake, Pâquerette.' And then he told her of the children's home in the rich, wooded country beyond Marly le Roi. He told her of the happy colony of little ones rescued from the slums of Paris, from such places as the Cité du Soleil. He told her how, for her sake, he had devoted some portion of his wealth and much of his time and care to this purpose, and how the work had prospered. 'If I can help it by precept or example, there shall be no children growing up in the dark yards of Paris, neglected, desolate, untaught, as you were in the days of your youth, my poor Pâquerette.'

'Yes; it was a miserable youth, was it not? And afterwards, when you were so good to me, when foolish people praised me, my head was turned. Life was all so new and strange, and I was eager for pleasure, for music and brightness—all the joys I had missed when I was a girl. And then I was

base and ungrateful, and my wicked heart rebelled against you, and turned——'

A flood of tears drowned her speech. She clasped her thin fingers over her eyes, and was silent, remembering how she had set up an idol of clay, a false god that had fallen and crushed her amidst the ashes of a ruined life.

The gray-robed Sister had left during this conversation. She came back at a summons from Ishmael, and knelt by the bed, praying in a low gentle voice. Ishmael bent to kiss the pale brow so soon to assume the awful coldness of death, and then went softly away, leaving only the womanly consoler, the voice of prayer and praise.

No one in the house knew what was the link between the famous engineer and the dying woman: an erring sister, perhaps, brought suddenly back to the fold; or, if not a near kinswoman, a close friend. No one guessed that it was Ishmael's guilty wife whose last hours were ebbing gently away.

Two doctors—the most distinguished in Paris—were in attendance upon that death-bed. They both were of opinion that the wound in itself would not have been fatal. The lungs had not been penetrated, and the injury to the pleura might have been got over in a healthy patient; but Pâquerette had been marked for death months ago.

'The wonder is, that she could have walked from Clichy to the Faubourg Saint-Honoré in her state,' said the physician. 'It was the act of a heroine. She tells me that she started soon after daybreak, and that she was several hours on the road. She had no money, no alternative but to crawl every inch of the way, while every breath she drew was pain. It is only women who can do these things.'

A piteous story, yes; and a story that had come to its closing page. Pâquerette lived for a day and a half after she had been forgiven, and died with Ishmael's roses in her hands, peacefully, in the morning glow, like a child sinking to sleep.

It was not till after Pâquerette's death that Ishmael tried to bring the trickster Dumont to book for the conspiracy which had been hatched against his honour and his happiness. The remorseful afterthoughts of many a bitter hour had told him that he had himself to blame for having trusted a broken-down profligate with a delicate mission, and for having put a price upon the evidence of his wife's death. His passionate desire to be free to marry the woman he loved had blinded him to the folly of his act—had tempted him to lean on such a rotten reed as Dumont.

He called to his aid one of the cleverest members of the Parisian police, and in the dusk of the evening after Pâquerette's death he revisited the Cité Jeanne d'Arc in the company of this man. The police-officer was dressed in plain clothes, but to the initiated eyes of the inhabitants of that colony he had the word *Raille* inscribed in capital letters upon his forehead.

They went straight to the house which Ishmael had visited with Dumont, ascended to the fourth landing, and, without even the polite preliminary of a knock, entered the room in which he had heard the dying Spaniard's story. They found themselves in the bosom of a large family, seated cheerily round the *pot-au-feu*, the savoury reek of which rose superior to the foul odours of the place. The inhabitants were new; even the poor sticks of furniture were different from those which Ishmael had seen in the room. And yet he was sure that it was the same room, as he had taken careful note of the number on the door on the previous occasion.

The people were civil—nay, overpoweringly courteous, and evidently overawed by the presence of Ishmael's companion. The man was a street hawker, and laid considerable stress upon the honesty and respectability of his avocation as compared with the pursuits by which many of the citizens of Jeanne d'Arc contrived to make their living. He made a point of being thus far autobiographical before he could be induced to give any information about his predecessors in the apartment.

The Spanish sailors? Yes; there had been two Spanish sailors in the room before he took it—just three weeks ago.

'One of the men died, did he not?' asked Ishmael. 'He was dying when I saw him on the second of July.'

'Dying! But no; the Spaniard was no more dying than I, Jacques Dubourg. He is a man who smokes opium, and spends half his life on shore in a state of stupefaction—worse than drunkenness, and yet not so bad, for he lies quiet on his *grabat* and interferes with no one. It was on the third of July that he and his comrade cleared out of the room. They were going back to Havre by the night-train. They had only been in Paris a week, and had hired their sticks of furniture from the guardian of the place, the porter at number one, who collects the rents and looks after the keys. I know all about it, you see, Messieurs, for I and my family came in just an hour afterwards, and the porter could only give us a room in the roof where the rain comes in by the pailful; so I was on the watch for the chance of a better room, and as soon as the Spaniards cleared out, we came down to the fourth floor. It is luxury after the hole we had above!'

This was the utmost information to be obtained here. Ishmael acknowledged the hawker's civility with a handsome *pour-boire*, which he dropped into the willing hand of the wife, hoping that, by this precaution, his benefaction might be spent upon something better than vitriol or 'little-blue;' and then he and his companion went downstairs and picked their way through the muddy channel to the door of number one, where they found the custodian of the place in an apartment which, although passing grimy, was at least wind and weather proof.

From this functionary they could obtain little more information than had been given them by the hawker. The Spanish sailors had come to the *cité* in the company of a decent-looking Parisian, who engaged the room for them, and paid in advance for a month's rent, and for the hire of the little lot of furniture. One of the sailors was represented as an invalid, who wanted to rest and recruit himself before he could go back to his ship. The porter supposed that they would occupy the apartment for at least a month. He was, therefore, much surprised when they brought him the key of their room on the afternoon of July the third, and informed him that he could take back his furniture. He had not seen their Parisian friend after the first occasion. This was all he knew.

The facts were clear enough to the mind of Ishmael. The story of the wreck of the 'Loro' was a trumped-up story, invented by Dumont with the aid of the Spaniard. Or, the story of the 'Loro' may have been a true story in all save Pâquerette's presence on board the vessel. The Spaniard, a chance acquaintance, perhaps, picked up at Havre, had been carefully taught the part which he had to play in the conspiracy; and Ishmael had been tricked into mistaking the symptoms of opium-poison for the signs of approaching dissolution. One fact, and one only, was not easily to be explained. By what means had the Spaniard or Dumont obtained possession of the packet of letters written by Hector de Valnois to Pâquerette, letters which no woman would have willingly parted with to a stranger?

Here was a mystery which neither Ishmael nor the police could fathom, not knowing the link between the man called Dumont and the writer of the letters.

The actual fact was, that Dumont, *alias* de Valnois, finding himself alone in his kinsman's lodging soon after he had received his commission from Ishmael, had ransacked Hector's bureau in the hope of finding some scrap of Pâquerette's handwriting which might serve him in the plot he was hatching, and had there discovered the packet of old love-letters, carefully put

away by Pâquerette herself in a hiding-place at the back of other papers.

On the day after Pâquerette's funeral Ishmael received a letter with the post-mark of Limerick. It was from Constance, who wrote from the chief hotel in that city :

'I am on my way to the dower-house at Kilrush,' she wrote, 'where I shall spend the coming autumn. I think it only right that you should know where I am, and that you should be free from all anxiety upon my account.

'Do your duty, Ishmael, and fear not the issue. If it please Providence that your wife recover from the peril she incurred to save you, take her to your heart and home again, if it be possible, and let your future happiness be found in that re-union. It is impossible you should continue unhappy if you follow the dictates of honour and conscience. God will be with us both, near or afar, so long as we walk bravely in the straight path.

'Ever your loyal friend,
'CONSTANCE DANETREE.'

So much and no more. Enough at least to tell him that there was no anger against him in that noble soul. He telegraphed his answer within an hour :

'Death has broken the old tie. In three months from to-day I shall go to the dower-house at Kilrush unless you forbid me.'

Three months of mourning for the wife who had died to him thirteen years before ; three months of hard work, which made his severance from his beloved easier to bear ; three months, during which time the Neapolitan Gavot was found guilty of an attempt to murder, and was condemned to *travaux forcés* for life ; three months, which saw the espousals of Amélie Jarzé with Armand de Kératry ; three months, in which the *teinturier* sank day by day a little lower in that awful gulf of mental decay to which the absinthe-drinker descends ; three months, during which the semi-imbecile hag from the Cité du Soleil awakened suddenly from a life-long dream of dirt and squalor to find herself in a wonderland of cleanliness and comfort represented by the neatly-furnished bedchamber of a hospital for old women. Here Mère Lemoine sat by the cosy little stove, and hugged the warmth, and gibbered and nodded in the sunshine, and muttered to herself about Jeanneton and Pâquerette, and asked her caretakers piteously for a taste of *pétrole*, *vitriol*, *casse-poitrine*—what you will ; and, it may be, she sometimes

regretted the freer life of the City of the Sun, the lantern and the basket, and the bottle of fierce potato-spirit hidden under the heap of rubbish and offal in the middle of her den.

It was the first week in November, the season of fallen leaves, low gray skies, and fox-hunting, when Ishmael went down the Shannon in a small steamer that plied between Tarbert and Kilrush. Those level shores of the noble Irish river, widening ever towards the sea, looked gray and mournful under the dull autumnal sky, white vapours creeping slowly over the fields in the eventide, and the coast on which he landed in the dusk had a barren look ; but the little town showed more lighted windows as signs of life than a *bourg* in his native Brittany could have shown ; and though there were some signs of decay and neglect, there were no indications of the hard, grinding poverty which forbids the lighted hearth, the rush candle, and curtails the cheery evening hour.

The driver of a dilapidated jaunting car took forcible possession of Ishmael on the instant he landed, and in this conveyance he was rattled along rustic lanes, which had a friendly look in the twilight, like and unlike the lanes about Pen-Hoël. He could feel the soft breath of the sea, and he found out afterwards that he was driving with his face towards the Atlantic. He passed a good many typical Irish cabins, roughly built of stone, rich in broken windows and all the traces of neglect ; yet, in most cases, the open door showed the cheery hearth within, the dresser with its gaily-coloured crockery. That dresser and that crockery seemed to be the national representative of the household virtues, the *penates* of the Irish peasant. Where all else was squalor and ruin, the dresser and the row of plates and jugs still remained : the very altar of home.

But a sharp turn of the road carried the traveller into a new region, a lane in which the cottages were more numerous, better built, with neatly-thatched roofs, steep picturesque gables, and tall clustered chimney-stacks ; cottages in well-kept gardens, where late autumn flowers were blooming, a little oasis of beauty and domestic comfort in a neglected land.

'It is her influence,' he thought. 'I am drawing near her home.'

He was not mistaken. About a quarter of a mile further the car entered a gateway by a Gothic lodge, drove through a magnificent shrubbery of conifers and arbutus, and drew up in front of a low, long Tudor house, with a roomy stone porch, in which a tall, beautiful woman, dressed in dark velvet, stood waiting for him, with two dogs—his old friend Lion and a superb Irish setter—in attendance upon her.

He was by her side in a moment, clasping her hands. He had written to her, and had heard from her more than once during the three months that ended to-day; but this was their first meeting since they parted at the church door on that day which was to have made them one for ever. And now the day was coming which was to complete that union. All arrangements had been made in advance, and to-morrow, in the Roman Catholic Chapel at Kilrush, Sébastien Caradec and Constance Danetree were to be married in the presence of old Lord Kilrush, who had returned from Homburg, disgusted alike with the results of the water cure and the *rouge-et-noir* cure; for in those days there were gaming-tables at Homburg-on-the-Maine.

To-night Ishmael was to rest at the Priest's house, the chief among those rustic dwellings which Constance Danetree's taste and outlay had called into being. On the Marquis's land the signs of neglect and dilapidation were as common as on most other Irish estates; but in this little corner, this happy land of two or three hundred acres, which belonged to his daughter, order, neatness, and prosperity reigned.

'Surely I can afford to spend as much on building a cottage as Spricht charges for one of his gowns,' she said, when some worldly-wise acquaintance remonstrated with her on the folly of spending her surplus income on the improvement of the dwellings of the poor.

'But they are not grateful,' complained her friend. 'I built new cottages for some of my people, and gave them delicious little kitcheners; and from that hour I have never had any peace at my country place. They don't understand the kitcheners, and they come and howl to me every time one of those poor little stoves goes wrong. Improvement is a mistake with those people. Let them grub on their own way, and give them plenty of wine and brandy when they are ill. That is *their* idea of a good landlord.'

'I don't care about gratitude,' replied Constance; 'but I adore pretty cottages, and bright hearths, and well-fed, comfortably-clad children; and I must have them about me whatever they cost. I can go without ostrich-feather bordering for my gowns, and I can buy a gown or two less in the course of the year.'

They talked together for a few minutes in the old panelled hall, those two happy lovers; and then Ishmael went into the drawing-room with his *fiancée* to be presented to Lord Kilrush, an aristocratic old gentleman with a Roman nose that had been slightly damaged in the days of his youth, a small waist, an elegant swagger, and a set of antique seals hanging from an

antique chain, which he played with almost perpetually with delicate, nervous fingers.

He received Ishmael graciously, and made himself very agreeable all dinner-time, but evidently had not a thought in common with his future son-in-law. His conversation was chiefly made up of inquiries about some of the worst people in Parisian society, and the raking-up of old scandals which seemed to have sunk deep into his mind, and old *bon-mots* on the verge of impropriety.

After dinner he went to sleep in a luxurious arm-chair close by the wide old-fashioned fireplace, and Ishmael and Constance had the rest of the evening to themselves.

They were married next morning in the pretty little chapel, and this time there was no tragic interruption of their wedding. The old priest snuffled a pious exhortation to the newly-wedded, the rustic choir sang a hymeneal hymn, and Lord Kilrush's carriage bore Ishmael and his wife on the first stage of their journey to Killarney, where they were to begin their honey-moon, under the soft gray skies, beside the calm blue lake, amidst groves of arbutus, bright with autumn's scarlet berries, beneath the shadow of the Purple Mountain.

In December they went back to Paris, Ishmael full of work, his wife full of pride and interest in that work of his: proudest of all when she saw the children's home beyond Marly, and heard that chorus of multitudinous voices sending up their glad peal of welcome, 'Monsieur Chose! Monsieur Chose!' while the happy faces all wore one broad smile of childish love. In all things she was his help-meet. In great achievements, in acts of benevolence; sharer of all his hopes, and all his dreams; noble inspirer of noble ideas.

And now, for his wife's sake—the pride of birth being an instinct among well-born women—he, who had been known so long throughout the length and breadth of the land as Ishmael, allowed himself to be known in Parisian society as Sébastien de Caradec, of Pen-Hoël; and now the old château above the winding Couësnon was beautified, restored, and expanded into one of the most perfect country houses in France; and wider lands were added to the shrunken estate of the Caradecs. Ishmael, the despised and outcast, had redeemed the fortunes of his race, and won renown for the name of his forefathers.

'Peace hath her victories as well as war.'

## CHAPTER XLII

### 'IN THE MIDST OF BABYLON HE SHALL DIE'

With the closing of 1867 the shadows darkened over the political horizon, and the Imperial star which had once ruled in so fair a heaven now rode in a sky that was charged with storm-clouds. Outwardly, this city of palaces, boulevards, and cafés was as brilliant as ever; but there was a worm at the root of the tree: trouble and confusion were in the minds of men; the nation found no place for the sole of her foot, between an Empire which was no longer Imperial in its policy, and a constitution which was not created. Even the little *bourgeoisie*, the narrow-minded gentry of the factory and the shop, who only wanted to sell their goods and fill their purses, even these were gloomy, looking upon this International Fair that was just over as the fat kine which would be found by-and-by to have eaten up the lean kine, forestalling public expenditure, and leaving a series of dull seasons to follow in a dispiriting future of impoverishment and decay.

That tragic memory of Queretaro weighed heavily on many a heart, while the Mexican loan had emptied many a widow's purse and pinched many an orphan. Nearer at hand there were rumours of a conspiracy, fulminating cotton manufactured in cellars, a secret society called the Commune Révolutionnaire des Ouvriers de Paris. The Red Viper, warmed in the bosom of the Empire, was turning its sting upon its protector.

In a letter written at this time by one of the Emperor's most faithful adherents, the note of warning, the cry of peril, was, for the first time, boldly sounded in the Imperial ear. 'The Empire crumbles on every side. Your enemies, under the pretext of founding a Parliamentary *régime*, have sworn your ruin; your ministers truckle to your adversaries; they abandon at a stroke the policy of the last fourteen years; your house is in flames.'

So wrote Persigny to his master; but the warning fell on a dull and reluctant ear. That Imperial master's health was failing, his mind was troubled by the inroads of an insidious disease. He who, in the bright morning of life, in the maturity of manhood, bold to audacity, with equal faith in himself and in destiny, had trusted in the star of his house, now looked to that star to save him from perils with which his genius had no longer power

to cope. He who once crossed the stream at the head of his legions, reckless how fierce might be the battle on the further shore, now folded himself in his Imperial mantle, in the sublime isolation of a neutral policy, and told his people that the temple of war was closed. Yes, the temple of victorious war was closed for ever for Napoleon the Third and his subjects—a temple draped in sackcloth. Victory had departed from France. The reign of the Eagles was over.

It was in the early spring of 1868, when the buds were unfolding upon the Emperor's tree—that chestnut in the Imperial gardens which was supposed to bloom just a little while before all other trees—it was in the bright balmy beginning of a fine April that an event occurred which made a twenty-four hours' wonder for the idle, talkative, great world of Paris, and distracted society for that brief space from the rumours of war, the discussion of the Emperor's proposed journey to Rome, Monseignor Dupanloup's manifesto on the subject of female education, and the exciting anticipation of a certain political journal of an ultra-revolutionary colour, to be issued presently by Henri de Rochefort, late contributor to the *Figaro*.

In these days there still existed in the vicinity of the Châtèlet an old, old street—marked for destruction, but not yet destroyed—a street historical with sinister histories ; picturesque from the standpoint of painter or poet ; hideous, revolting as a place in which to live ; perilous as a place through which to pass. The police of Paris, excellent, brave to recklessness, but much too few for the work they have to do, avoided this Rue de la Vielle Lanterne unless summoned thither by some special cause. It was an abode of crime, given over to criminals. The *pantre*—or layman—who penetrated the mystery of the place went thither at his peril.

This hideous alley ended in a kind of staircase, leading to a street on a lower level. On one of those balmy April mornings, when the breeze blowing from the river seemed charged with the perfume of distant orchards and flower gardens, or, at least, with the breath of the flower-market yonder, a man was found hanging from the massive old iron bar of a window in the house looking upon this staircase—dead.

He was not an inhabitant of the street, nor was he known to any of its occupants, who came out of their doors and hung out of their windows in a matinal disarray to stare and wonder at this strange guest who had come among them in the darkness of the night, and had taken up his abode there so quietly, none hearing the groan or the sigh with which his spirit fled from its

gaunt and wasted tenement. He looked like a gentleman, though his garments were in the last stage of shabbiness, just as his poor frame was in the last stage of attenuation.

The police were summoned, took their cool survey of the details of the case : a new rope bought on purpose for this final act, and tied securely to the stout iron window-bar ; a loose block of stone by which the suicide had clambered to the window, tied his rope, made his noose, slipped it over his head, and then kicked away the stone. It was all as simple as *bon jour*. This repulsive spot had doubtless been chosen as a haven where a man might kill himself in peace, secure from sympathy, rescue, officious interruption. In Paris, where suicide is a fine art, this new development astonished nobody.

There were no papers in the dead man's pockets. The police had only to carry the corpse to the Morgue yonder, and leave it there for recognition. Some one would be sure to recognise. The hour of recognition came quickly. A medical student from the Boul Mich strolled into the Morgue to look about him by way of education ; saw the haggard face lying there, with a strange, wan smile, half *débonnaire*, half cynical, and recognised an old acquaintance of the Ecossaises and the Pantagruel—a man who was the most brilliant talker in the circle of Râtés at the latter resort—a man who, of late years, had called himself Jean Nimporte, but who was well known to all literary Paris as Hector de Valnois, author of *Mes Nuits Blanches*, once one of the finest critics, and one of the most promising poets in France—a man who might have been a power in the land. Alas ! Hades is peopled with the pale, pinched shades of the men who might have been great !

The student's eyes clouded as he stood looking down at the patrician face, the delicate chiselling of the features, accentuated by the rigidity of death.

'Poor devil ! Was not the absinthe-poison killing him fast enough, that he must needs take a short cut to his coffin ?' he muttered. 'Well, I will send round the hat to-night at the Pantagruel, and we will bury him decently with Balzac and the rest. Roumestan, the eloquent young Marseillaise advocate, who is going to be one of the greatest men in France, shall make a speech above his grave.'

Within a week of the closing of that grave in the cemetery of Père Lachaise the Vicomte de Pontchartrain's second volume of poems, *Charniers et Sépulcres*, was given to the Parisian world—a dainty little volume, attenuated as the Vicomte himself, printed on satin paper, bordered with carmine, enriched with symbolical initials and floral tail-pieces.

The verses were received with enthusiasm by that little knot of advanced thinkers who welcome the wild, the extravagant, the audacious, the obscure in art and literature; and in the Paris of those days advanced thought was considered a distinction, not that in 1867 we had quite reached that outspoken Gospel of Atheism which is the latest vogue by way of poetry. The verses were the last development of the spasmodic school—'*du Baudelaire poussé au vif*,' said one of the critics; bitter as absinthe; despairing; the death-throes of a life's agony; and, despite of many flaws, the book attracted the town and was talked of everywhere.

The little Vicomte was enchanted with his success. His book was talked about wherever he went. He was called upon to explain and elucidate certain passages: his meaning here, the subtle underlying intention there, this or that profound thought: not always an easy task for a poet of the obscure school. But Pontchartrain came through it splendidly; philosophised and declaimed to circles of listening women, breathless as they hung upon his eloquence. In a word, he was the fashionable success of the season, the sought for in every *salon*.

It was during a *soirée* at the Tuileries, when the poet had been complimented by the Emperor himself, and had retired from that august presence flushed with visions of the Legion of Honour and the Academy, that Madame de Kératry, exquisitely dressed in a gown by Spricht, laughing, joyous, triumphant in her new *rôle* of *jeune mariée*, took him into the embrasure of a window, and asked him to sit by her side for a few minutes, as she had something—a little secret, a laughable anecdote—to tell him.

And then, beaming at him with radiant smiles, she told him of her visit to the *teinturier's* den, and how she and Kératry had been hidden in the loft, and had heard him bargaining for the verses which had made him famous.

'Do not you feel, now that your book is creating a *furore*, that you might have given that poor creature a little more money for his work?' she said, reproachfully. 'And I heard, the other day, that he hanged himself in an old street in Paris in an interval of insanity brought about by drink; much more, perhaps, by poverty and the wretched life he led. There was an account of his funeral in one of the papers; a grand speech made by a young advocate called Rouméstan, whom people talk of as the successor to Berryer and Arago.'

'The verses you talk of were mere experiments—impossible attempts, which I collected as a curious study in the decadence

of a once brilliant mind,' said the Vicomte, trying to make the best of a desperate situation. 'You cannot for a moment suppose that I—— ?'

'That you palmed off another man's work as your own ! Of course, not, Vicomte ; especially after your indignation one day at Lady Constance Danetree's, when I mentioned the *teinturier ;* "*Cela ne se peut pas !*" you cried, in a tumult of fine feeling ; "*Cela ne se peut pas !*" If I were to tell people that story !'

She burst out laughing, hiding herself behind her fan in a convulsion of mirth.

'I daresay you have told every creature of your acquaintance,' exclaimed Pontchartrain, furiously.

'Not a mortal. But I confess that, if it had not been for the sake of Hortense, who is silly enough to believe in you and to admire you, I should have told all Paris. The story is too good to be locked up in my memory.'

'Perhaps, for your sister's sake, you will continue to keep your counsel about a matter which you entirely misunderstand,' said the Vicomte, with dignity ; and then he rose and stalked away, leaving Madame de Kératry still laughing behind her fan.

He proposed to Hortense next morning, and is happy in the worship of a wife who still believes in him long after the world at large has found out that he is a sham.

THE END.

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